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"IS THIS ALL THE MONEY YOU'VE GOT—A PALTRY FIVE DOLLARS?"
THE ROAD-AGENT DEMANDED.

OR, THE PREACHER OF POKERVILLE.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,
AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE REV. MR. JIMSON.

UP in Pokerville, Nevada, there was a sensation.

Pokerville, until about ten days before the time of our tale, had been, in Western parlance, a very lively town.

Up to ten days ago she was a great town in her own imagination; then a cyclone came along and rather lifted the "city" over into the adjoining Territory.

Little but debris of Pokerville now remains. But, in the days before the cyclone, Pokerville was pre-eminently a "fly" town.

While there were but half a dozen moderately paying mines in the vicinity, there was plenty of good grazing country surrounding, where a large amount of help was employed, and Pokerville was therefore headquarters for a "jamboree."

The town consisted of two general stores, a blacksmith shop, a hall known as the "Theater," and seven saloons, with a sprinkling of shanties and sod-houses.

Pokerville was the center-spot of attraction for gamblers, and those who wished to gamble, for its particular part of the Territory. Men who had a few dollars to risk came from far and near, and it was the stamping-ground for such sharpers as Sam Leonard, Sandy McPherson, and old Mike Quincy.

Every saloon was a gaming establishment. In fact, the other business of the town sunk into actual insignificance as compared with that done at the gaming-tables.

The principal place of resort was the "Pokerville Club," a combined saloon and gaming institution, run by Mike Quincy.

It was likewise the most elaborately fitted-up place in the camp.

Adjoining this place was a large slab shanty with a big floor surface. This, too, belonged to Quincy, who had had it built with a view to turning it into a theater. He had even gone so far as to put in the seats, which were nothing but rough benches; but before he got it finished his finances were at a low ebb, through a bad run of luck at poker, and so the project fell through, and the embryo theater stood idle.

Until one day, along came a long, raw-boned, lean individual, togged out in a suit of well-worn broadcloth, a shabby high hat, and white cravat—a man of perhaps five and forty years, who wanted to rent the building.

He was, to say the least, an extraordinary looking personage. His hair was a genuine red in color, and his eyes were preternaturally black. His left ear was gone, his long nose was warped to one side, and he had a cast in one eye.

Such was the individual who strode into the Pokerville Club one day, and demanded of Mike Quincy, who presided behind the bar:

"I say, stranger, who mou't have the rentin' o' the store next door?"

"I have," replied Mike, gruffly. "What of it?"

"Ca'se I mou't rent it, ef ther tariff ain't tew blessed high. How much rent a month mou't you be taxin'?"

"More than you can pay, I reckon. What d'y'e want a place for?"

"For a church!"

"A church? Why, cuss it, man, ye must be stark, ravin' mad!"

"Not at all!" was the reply. "I am the Reverend Jim Jimson, and I have come here to preach to you sinners, an' convert ye to a better life!"

Quincy burst out into a roar of laughter.

"Church?" he echoed. "Why, blarst et, ye durned fool, ef ye was ter start sech a fandango in this hyer camp, ye'd be a corpse afore yer furst sermon was over, sure! The boys wouldn't have it, nohow. They'd tar-an'-feather ye, an' then run ye up to a limb."

"Oh! I'll take my chances on *that*, me friend!" Jimson replied, grimly. "I wasn't fetched up in the woods to be skeart out by owls. What'll ye take a month fer the shebang?"

Now, Mike Quincy enjoyed a joke as well as the next one, and he foresaw by renting his property to this uncouth alleged minister, he would be able to raise no little amount of fun for his patrons, and at the same time turn a penny into his coffers for himself.

"Well," he said, after brief consideration, "I Cain't say I'm much on religion, but, ef ye want that shanty, ye kin hev it ther furst month free of charge. If ye want it after that, you'll have to plank down twenty dollars a month!"

"That's a bargain!" Jimson allowed. "Even in thy wickedness, I see that thou possesest the germs of blessedness, and verily it pleases me greatly. I thank you for your seemly generosity, and on Sunday next there will be preaching in this wicked place, that will stir its inhabitants as they were never stirred before. I will point out ter 'em the evil o' their ways, an' prove to 'em that unless they take a better trail, they're goners!"

"Waal, all I've got ter say," Mike Quincy replied, "is that you'd better move an arsenal inter yer shebang, an' hire a regiment ter man it, ef ye purpose to spout enny sech stuff as that. Ther galoots as hangs out around hyar, ain't very religius, you bet!"

"I will attend to all that," the Reverend Mr. Jimson averred. "I have had much experience in rough mining-camps, and never any trouble, as yet. Ef you will give me the keys, I will move in, and get ready for business. But, first, let's have something to drink."

"What! preachers don't drink?"

"Not for the sake of drinking, as drinking goes, but for ther strength and maintenance of mind and body, to enable these organs to perform their functions, properly, my dear brother. Mine is whisky!"

Mike Quincy eyed the alleged reverend gentleman a moment, with the greatest curiosity; then set forth the bottle and glasses.

He had met many odd phases of character, in his time, but this was the first *bona fide* preacher he had ever met who indulged in the flowing bowl.

"Go ahead," he said. "I opine you'll find that stuff will warm a feller up on a day like this, fer et's warranted forty-hoss power. Ef it hits you in ther neighborhood o' ther belt, don't fergit to call ag'in."

"I never forget a kindness," Jimson gravely replied, as he poured out "five fingers," gulped it down, paid for drinks for the two, and then took his departure, after obtaining the keys to the next door.

That afternoon, in the drizzling rain, he moved in two huge trunks and a stove, locked the door, coated the windows with whitening, so that no one could see in, and that was the last seen of him for the rest of that day.

But the report had spread throughout the camp that a preacher had arrived to establish a church, and a curious crowd had gathered, even in the drizzling rain, to watch and await developments.

But they waited in vain.

It was not until the next morning that the Rev. Mr. Jimson was again to be seen.

Early in the morning it was to be noted that upon the door of the proposed new church was a painted tin sign, containing the following announcement:

"CHURCH OF ZION,
JIM JIMSON, - - - - PASTOR.
SEATS FREE!"

Services: 10 A. M. and 7:30 P. M., Sundays."

As a matter of course, this announcement was decisive, and the excitement became something great.

Crowds collected before the door, read the sign, and the expression of opinions, on the matter of a church in Pokerville, were far more forcible than elegant.

"We don't want no church in this town, no more'n we want ther small-pox!"

"Not muchly we dcn't!" seconded another. "Et jest goes ter p'int out that we're a pack o' heathen, as ain't smart euuff ter do our own preachin'!"

"Well," said Sam Leonard, philosophically, "I dunno as I've got any serious objections so long as the cuss will let me put a three-card monte table in one corner of the shebang. I reckon I could make it pay."

At which there was a general laugh.

In the mean time, apparently all unconscious of the adverse comment in regard to his enterprise, the Rev. Jimson was enjoying a cocktail at Mike Quincy's bar.

"Yas," he remarked to Mike, "everything is all ready for business, and next Sunday I'll whoop'er up in a way that'll startle the natives."

"Better look out the natives don't whoop you up, to ther limb of a tree," Mike advised. "I reckon ye won't make many converts, here in Pokerville, an' I did hear Screechin' Sam say—an' Sam aire ther bully o' the place—that he had ordered Carpenter Jones to prepare a wooden overcoat fer you!"

Now, this was consoling news, for a timid spirit to undergo; but, to all intents and purposes the new Preacher of Pokerville was not one of the timid sort, for he simply shrugged his shoulders, and smiled.

"He who does right, and teaches what is right, need have no fear!" he replied.

The foregoing had happened in the early part of the week; the remainder of the week, the Reverend Mr. Jimson spent the most of his time at the Pokerville Club.

Sometimes he drank, sometimes he gambled, and at all times succeeded in making himself a conspicuous figure.

Who was he? what was he? was the problem that "knocked the Pokervillians silly," as they expressed it. If he was a preacher, he certainly

was a queer one, and by no means as strict in habits as his brethren of the pulpit usually are.

The week dragged along, and, at last, Sunday arrived, on which day Pokerville was to hear its first sermon.

Sunday, in Pokerville, hitherto, had not differed from any other day; but on the present occasion, its citizens were on the *qui vive* with excitement and speculation as to what the day would bring forth.

The Reverend Jim Jimson was going to "whoop'er up," on the subject of religion.

Had there been a circus in town, the excitement could have been no greater.

CHAPTER II.

THE STORY OF A FRAUD.

WHEN Deadwood Dick left Cincinnati, heretofore related, he went straight to St. Louis, to hunt up Simeon Snip, who was in need of the services of a detective.

In writing to Mr. Clincher, Snip had not given his address, and Clincher had forgotten what it was, himself; so practically there remained nothing for Deadwood Dick to do, but to hunt up Snip as best he could.

It was a damp, misty morning, and hanging low over the city was a great black pall of smoke that precluded the possibility of seeing the sky, the smoke coming from the thousand manufactories and many steamers plying up and down the Mississippi.

Dick had made some inquiries, on the train, and taking a cab, at the depot, was driven to the Planter's Hotel, where he registered, and at once sought for information as to Simeon Snip; but, no one appeared to know anything about such a citizen.

Dick next sought out a City Directory, gave that a careful search and was at last successful in locating his man. Mr. Simeon Snip, commission merchant, resided at No. — Missouri avenue.

So, calling a cab, in due time the detective was set down in front of a palatial residence, which occupied the center of a well-kept lawn.

Crossing the lawn and ascending the piazza, Dick rung the bell—a summons that was answered by a good-looking German girl.

"Is Mr. Snip at home?" Dick inquired.

"No, sir. He vas not."

"Do you know where he is?"

"Nein! He vas go avay off somewhere."

"Is any of his family at home?"

"Yes, Miss Sally is."

"Can I see her?"

"I vil find oud. Yoost step into der parlor and vait."

Dick found himself in a tastily furnished room.

Dick had been seated but a couple of minutes when a young lady entered the room.

She was about eighteen years of age, of slight build, rather fresh-faced, and good-looking.

"Did you wish to see me, sir?" she asked.

"If you please," Dick replied. "Am I addressing Miss Snip?"

"Yes, sir, I am Miss Snip. What can I do for you?"

"I called to see your father," Dick replied, "but the servant girl told me that he was not at home. So I thought I had best see you!"

"No, papa is not at home. He left a week ago for Nevada."

"Nevada! Why, his friend, Mr. Clincher, of Cincinnati, received a letter from him only yesterday, asking him to send him a first-class detective. So Mr. Clincher prevailed upon me to hasten to St. Louis."

"That letter was mailed nearly two weeks ago, and must have been mislaid or detained somewhere in transit, for I remember distinctly when papa mailed it. He said: 'I'll wait a few days yet for an answer, and if none comes I'll start out alone.' No answer came; so he started. Are you a detective, sir?"

"I am. My name is Bristol. Do you know what it was your father wanted of me, Miss Snip?"

"No more than that he wanted a detective to accompany him—more as a protection than aught else, I should presume."

"To what place did your father go in Nevada, may I ask?"

"To a small town called Pokerville."

"Pokerville! Humph! I never heard of such a place, and I know the State like a book."

"It is near the Utah line, I believe, and also near a town named Bullionville."

"What took your father out into that wild country?"

"Well, I'll tell you. Four years ago he bought heavily of the stock of a mine known as the Electric Mine, at Pokerville. He never

went to see the mine but bought the stock, simply on the strength of the glowing accounts sent him by a school-boy friend, as he spoke of him, named David Dale, who claimed to be principal stockholder in the mine. I believe papa invested to the extent of something like ten thousand dollars."

"A very unbusiness-like way of doing business I should say!" Dick observed.

"It was because papa placed the most absolute confidence in David Dale, who had been a school-boy friend, as I said, and I think, too, that he is in some way related to papa."

"Well, a year passed, after papa had made the investment, and then Dale declared a dividend, which papa considered very satisfactory, but, before another year had elapsed, Dale wrote that the mine had played out, and the yield was not large enough to pay for the working; consequently the stock was worthless, and the mine had been abandoned. Dale wrote that he had succeeded in disposing of his stock, at five cents on the dollar, and advised papa to try and do likewise.

"But, papa being an honorable man, would not do anything of the sort. He would not knowingly swindle anybody out of a cent; so he put away the stock certificates in his safe, and considered himself lucky that he had invested no more than he had."

"Well, is that all?" Dick asked.

"No. Matters ran along until a few weeks ago, when father was astounded to learn, through a man from Nevada, that the Electric Mine had not failed or been abandoned at all, but had continued to prosper, and was doing better than ever. David Dale was in full possession, and rapidly acquiring an immense fortune!"

"I suppose your father was mad, then?"

"Mad? Well, I should say so! He at once sent the letter to Mr. Clincher of Cincinnati. As no detective came he packed up his valise, and started off alone, in spite of my protestations. Oh! sir, I fear that something fearful will happen. I am worried and sick over the matter."

"Oh! I wouldn't worry, for I presume, as he still has his stock certificates, he will maintain his property rights. As there seems nothing for me to do, I guess I'll be going."

"No! no! I have something for you to do. You must go in search of my father. Before he left, he told me that, if a detective should come, to send him at once to Pokerville. He left two hundred dollars to give to the detective, to defray his expenses. Will you go-go at once?"

"I will," Dick replied. "The fastest conveyances shall carry me, for in the wild country where your father has gone, he may find the need of a friend who is thoroughly posted in Wild West ways and I am just that person."

So he received the two hundred dollars, and, bidding Miss Snip good-by, hurriedly took his departure, and, in an hour's time was steaming away toward Denver.

CHAPTER III.

SCARLET SETH SAYS "HANDS UP!"

We will pass over Deadwood Dick's journey to Pokerville, until he had reached a point about ten miles from the tough little town, as being unimportant to our story; but when he reached the above-mentioned point, something occurred that demanded notice.

It was the close of a cold drizzling day, and Saturday at that.

Dick had been traveling on horseback since daybreak, and both he and the horse he bestrode were greatly fatigued, and the horseman had, for the last few hours, kept a sharp lookout, in hopes of discovering some place where to pass the night with more comfort than out in the rain.

They were in the midst of a tract of wild, barren country, covered only with blackened dead scrub-oaks, pine and sage-bush, which fire had at some time licked over.

There were many windfalls and treacherous arroyos, and, altogether, it was a place in which one would hardly expect to find a human habitation.

"I reckon we won't be apt to find accommodations in this lonesome place," Dick mused. "If my compass does not misdirect me, we cannot be far from Pokerville; so, I suppose about the only thing to do is to poke right along until we get there."

They jogged along for half an hour longer, and then came the event above alluded to, and which, considering the remoteness of the region, was a decided surprise to the detective.

A man stepped suddenly from behind a stump,

and flashing the light of a large bull's-eye lantern upon the horseman and at the same time covering him with a 44-caliber cocked revolver, cried out, in a sharp, business-like tone of voice:

"Halt! Hands up, or you're a dead man!"

Dick immediately obeyed, well realizing that the man with the lantern was a desperado. The ring of his voice bespoke that fact.

Dick drew rein, and held up his hands, at the same time eying the outlaw with a keen, searching gaze.

He was a six-footer, in his top-boots, and though not particularly large of limb, or trunk, was evidently a person of considerable strength.

He was attired in a suit that had been dyed a bright scarlet, while his broad-rim hat was of a like hue. Little of his face could be seen, as he wore a cowl mask.

Dick noticed three points, however, that would have escaped less keen eyes.

The outlaw's hands were white, and evidently not accustomed to manual labor; there was nothing upon his chin, which was visible below the cowl; and last, but not least, his hair was red, matching well with the color of his habiliments.

Fixing his lantern on a log so that its full rays covered horse and rider, he glided toward Deadwood Dick with a quick, stealthy step, and when he had reached the horse's side, he ordered:

"Take a drop out o' the saddle, to the ground, and mind ye keep yer dukes well up in the air, ef ye don't want ter git salivated!"

Again Dick obeyed. Seemingly he was as meek as a lamb.

"I want to see if you haven't a little coin to contribute to the missionary fund, for the enlightenment of the South Sea Islanders," the outlaw said, as he deliberately proceeded to go through Dick's pockets.

"Who are *you*?" Dick demanded, not particularly alarmed about his money, for, with the exception of a few coins, his funds were secreted in a little pocket underneath the lapel of his saddle.

"I'm Scarlet Seth, the flyest road-agent of the age," was the grim reply. "I'm a dandy, and don't yer fergit it!"

"I won't!" Dick assured. "I'll always keep the fact fresh and green in my memory. By the way, my friend, I reckon the haul you'll make from me to-night won't be sufficient capital to start you in any more eligible business than you are now engaged in."

"Is this all the money you've got—a paltry five dollars," the road-agent demanded, having finished searching Dick's pockets.

"Why, to be sure, if that is all you found. Don't remember just exactly what change I had. You don't expect a traveler in this wilderness to be carrying a National Bank around in his pockets, these hard times, do you? Why, when I get to my journey's end, I shall have to sell my Rosinante, in order to get anything to eat!"

"Whar ye goin'?"

"To Pokerville. How far off is it?"

"About ten miles. I reckon ye won't tarry long in that town 'thout money."

"Why not?"

"Ca'se the boyees o' Pokerville aire a hard crowd, and ef a feller ain't got the sugar to set 'em up for 'em handsum, you can bet that feller gits bounced immeget."

"Oh, I'll take my chances!" Dick declared, coolly. "Well, are you done with me?"

"Yes. Git onter yer horse, and skip! Don't attempt to try no funny business, neither, or I'll nail ye. When ye git to Pokerville, tell 'em that Scarlet Seth, the King-Pin of Road-raiders, sent his regards, and promised to pay 'em a visit soon!"

Dick made no reply, but, mounting his horse, rode away toward Pokerville.

"It's lucky for Dick Bristol I was thoughtful enough to secrete my money," he mused, "for, otherwise the nimble-fingered Seth would have scooped in a nice boodle. I'm glad he didn't take my revolvers, for probably I may need 'em when I get to Pokerville, if the citizens are as tough as Mr. Scarlet outlines. Humph! who'd thought of meetin' a real *bona fide* road-agent in this desolate tract of country?"

Three miles further on, Dick came to a deserted cabin, minus both window, sash and door; but the roof was good enough to keep out the rain, and rider and horse lost no time in taking possession.

Dick was not long in scraping together enough material to make a rousing fire, and soon had the cabin as warm as toast.

Unfortunately he had nothing to eat, either for himself or his horse, a fact that caused him a pang of regret, for he was very hungry.

However, there was no help for it, and so he passed the night sitting by the fire, arousing from a doze now and then, only long enough to pile on fresh fuel.

Morning at last dawned, bleak and dreary, and Dick once more set out on his journey, although neither he nor his horse felt like moving a limb.

The route now lay through a more fertile section, where the land was suitable for tilling and grazing purposes.

An hour's ride brought him to a little, primitive farm-house, where at small expense, he succeeded in getting a "square meal," such as it was.

"We kain't give ye no great shucks of a spread out," the settler said, "'cause we're poor, an' have to figger cluss. But, et's a welcome sight fer sore eyes when a stranger cumbs along, an' we're glad to give him the best the shebang affords!"

After breakfast Dick paid his bill, and feeling much refreshed, continued his journey, and, at about ten o'clock that morning, rode into the straggling little town of Pokerville, which presented a holiday appearance.

Saloons were wide open, sounds of music issued from the variety theater, early as was the hour, and quite a crowd was gathered in front of the edifice, where the Reverend Jim Jimson to-day proposed to deliver his first sermon.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HOME OF THE DALES—FATHER AND SON.

The residence of David Dale, owner of the Electric Mine, was the only one in Pokerville that made any pretensions to being handsome or genuinely comfortable.

It stood upon a little rise of ground, overlooking the town, and was built of the stone which abounded in the vicinity. It was of two stories, with wings, and was surrounded by a rustic fence that was quite attractive in itself.

A small piazza overlooked the town, and also a bay window, which opened upon this piazza.

The yard in front was adorned with flower-beds and shrubbery, and here and there along the winding graveled walk was a rustic settee.

Within, the house was comfortably furnished, though not luxuriously so, for in that cut-of-the-way locality luxury was a thing as yet comparatively unknown.

The parlor boasted of a carpet, sofa, a bookcase and desk, and pictures on the wall, to which a grate, with a cheery fire, added a pleasing effect.

The Sunday morning on which Jim Jimson was going to "open up," found David Dale and his son, Julian, seated before the grate fire, engaged in conversation at an hour just after day-break, when the camp was yet hardly astir.

The reflection of the ruddy firelight upon their faces, indicated that they were not in the best of spirits.

David Dale was in his fiftieth year, with a portly, robust figure, a rather massive countenance, full brown beard, and eyes and hair of a corresponding hue.

He was a plain dresser, and one would have hardly judged by his clothes, that he was a man of wealth.

Julian, his son, was a strong, athletic young fellow of four and twenty, but did not particularly resemble his father, inasmuch as his hair and eyes were jetty-black, and his face more thin and expressive.

It took but a glance to see that he was a subject of dissipation, for the tip of his nose was beginning to assume the tell-tale hue, and there were dark rings beneath his none too clear eyes.

He sported a daintily waxed mustache, and he dressed fashionably but not extravagantly.

"It is strange Miller sent us that information, and yet we have not been able to find out anything to verify it!" David Dale remarked, stroking his beard in an uneasy, restless fashion. "If Snip is coming here, he should, even by slow stages, have been here several days ago. You are sure no strangers arrived in town yesterday?"

"Yes. I was up until midnight, and none had come up to that time."

"What were you doing up so late as that, my son?"

"Oh! having a social game of cards!" Julian replied, with careless mien.

"More likely you were in the company of that odious young woman they call Frisky Fan!" David rejoined with a scowl.

"Supposing I was!" Julian retorted, somewhat defiantly. "Miss Fanny is all right, and I can .

lay out the man who dares utter a word against her, and if I can't there are plenty who will help me."

"Your enthusiasm over this woman is unworthy the name of Dale!" the elder declared. "You were born the son of a gentleman, and I had always hoped you would be choice of your associations. Who is this young woman—this girl, for she is nothing more? No one knows who she is, where she came from, or what is her pedigree. It can not be much when she will run a gaming-table."

"Yet, I noticed the other night, that you were deeply engrossed in a game of cards with her—deeply engrossed, but whether in the game or in her, I am of course unable to say!" Julian replied, with wicked sarcasm.

The elder Dale flinched at this, and for several minutes said nothing; but finally he went on:

"Yes, I admit I did play cards with her, but it was because I had heard you were enamored of her, and I wanted to discover, if possible, what kind of a person she was."

"When she launched herself upon this town, six months ago, it was in the garb and character of a young male sport—a character she has since maintained. She bought out Bob Peterson, and started a faro game, which she has run ever since. Now is this becoming of a lady, worthy of the regard of a Dale?"

"Worthy is all right, but if old Snip should drop in upon the Dale heritage we might have to discount Dale pride and pretension," Julian said, maliciously. "As for Fanny Ferris," he went on, "no one can truthfully say a reproachful word of her except that she runs a faro-bank. She has told me she has no parents, no brothers or sisters, and has to depend wholly upon herself for her support. I admire her for her independence, her fearlessness, and her dignity which repels undue familiarity!"

"Spoken with the ardor of a gallant swain!" David sneered. "However, if you want to make a fool of yourself, I suppose that is your privilege, so long as you support yourself!"

"Does that imply that you intend to withdraw from me any further advances?"

"Until you cease your attentions to this Ferris woman!"

"Very well. Then I suppose we might as well consider ourselves enemies in the future, for I have no intention of relinquishing my attentions to Frisky Fan. If I can induce her to marry me, I shall do so."

"And disgrace me and your sisters and your brothers, eh? Don't dare to attempt such a thing!" and his face flushed hot with anger.

Julian laughed, mockingly.

"One would naturally have supposed that, in an hour of peril, when the impending ax is swung aloft, a parent would prefer his son's friendship to his enmity. However, all parents are not alike, I believe. Good-morning. I believe I will go and hear the new preacher!"

The elder sprung to his feet, fairly livid with passion.

"You ingrate!" he cried, "what do you mean by those words? Answer me!"

"I mean!" Julian defiantly replied, "that, when old Snip, of St. Louis, arrives, he may want an able guide to show him the ins and outs of our noble city. As I am well posted, I shall most likely apply for the situation. Good-day!"

He then essayed to pass from the room, but his father seized him, and hauled him back.

"You will, hey?" grasping Julian by the throat. "Do you want me to choke the life out of you, you scamp?"

"Let the boy go!"

Dale was startled, and relinquishing his hold turned to behold a stranger standing just within the room, near the bay window—a man attired in a suit of scarlet, with scarlet hat, and scarlet mask, the latter covering all of his face but the chin. And this interesting individual held a cocked revolver at David Dale's head.

"Who are you, and what are you doing here?" David demanded, savagely.

"Easy! easy!" the Scarlet Man replied, good-humoredly. "Don't get excited, Mr. Dale, for, as I have a little business with you, I want you to be in full possession of all your faculties."

Then, turning to Julian, the road-agent added:

"We will excuse you, Mr. Julian. If you are in love with Frisky Fan, try to win her, by all means, for she is well worth any honest man's love, and I believe your intentions are honest. Woe be unto you if they are not. Go!"

Julian bowed and left the room.

Scarlet Seth then turned his attention to David Dale, who still stood in the center of the room.

"Well!" the road-agent said, interrogatively.

"Well!" returned Dale. "Who are you, why are you here in this masquerade, and what do you want?"

"I want to have a few words with you," Scarlet Seth blandly replied, "in regard to the case of Mr. Simeon Snip, of St. Louis, and the case of Frisky Fan, the girl gambler. Sit down, Mr. Dale. Make yourself at home."

CHAPTER V.

THE FIRST SERMON IN POKERVILLE.

PROMPTLY at the hour appointed, the doors of the Reverend Jim Jimson's church were thrown open, and the crowd waiting outside thronged in, and soon every seat was taken.

And such a crowd it was!

There were men of all grades, but mostly of the rougher element; men who had never been inside a church, or heard a word of gospel spoken; men, who long ago in the dim past had been faithful Sunday-school attendants, but who had long since forgotten their early teachings; men who could look back on the past when their mothers taught them that the way of the transgressor is hard; men who were born with a natural hatred for anything that was good or elevating—born, as it were, under an evil star.

There were a few, who, once reputable church-going citizens, had been driven to despair by the relentless grip of adversity, and, in a weak moment, had taken the wrong trail; a fewer, who remembered their early happy days, as connected with church or Sabbath-school, and were glad of the opportunity to hear a word of good spoken.

There was also a sprinkling of females in the audience—miners' wives and daughters, who were eager to hear what the Reverend Mr. Jimson had to say.

It was to be the day of days for Pokerville, and every one was on the *qui vive*.

Prominent among the audience were the three lucky gamblers of Pokerville—Mike Quincy, Sam Leonard and Sandy McPherson, and they occupied front seats.

In the rear of the audience stood Deadwood Dick, who had arrived too late to get a seat, and near him stood Frisky Fan, the girl gambler.

She was one of those eccentric characters occasionally met with in the mining-camps.

She was, apparently, about nineteen years of age, and possessed a finely molded figure, a round, pretty face, sunny hair, and blue eyes. That she was attractive no one could gainsay.

She was clad in a fashionably-cut suit of male attire, which set off her figure to advantage. Upon her feet were dainty patent leather shoes, while her head was crowned by a jaunty sombrero of milky-white, pinned up at the left side with a diamond-studded arrow.

She had been covertly watching Dick for several minutes, ere she essayed to speak to him; then, gradually edging up, she said, in a low tone:

"They allow there's going to be preaching here to-day, stranger?"

"So I understand," Dick replied, with a swift survey of the girl sport. "It will be quite a novelty for the camp, eh?"

"Yes, a novelty that's much needed!" Frisky Fan replied. "There's more sinners to the square rod, here in Pokerville, than in any other town I know of. If the galoot has got sand, he'll most likely strike it rich, but, if he shows any sign of weakening, the gang will mob him, sure's my name is Fanny Ferris."

Dick rightly took this as a hint of introduction, and accordingly he replied:

"Fanny Ferris, eh?"

"Yes. Here in camp they call me Frisky Fan, for short. I run a bank down the street—the only square place of the kind in town."

Not knowing what sort of a character Miss Frisky Fan might be, Dick refrained from making any answer.

The Reverend Jimson now stepped from behind a screen, and entered the extemporized pulpit, and his appearance was the signal for a tremendous outburst of applause.

Jimson bowed his acknowledgments, and patiently waited for the hubbub to cease.

He was cleanly-shaven, his hair was neatly brushed, and he wore a clean cravat and tie. On the pulpit in front of him lay a small Bible.

After the first outburst of applause, the rough audience became so quiet that the drop of a pin might have been heard.

Then, the Reverend Jimson said:

"My brothers and sisters, I am highly gratified to look upon so large an audience, to welcome my first appearance here, as a minister of the gospel. I have come among you to preach to you the Holy Writ, in hopes that it may do you good, and cause you to change many of

your ways for the better, for surely no one can listen attentively to the word of the divine Master, without receiving a real spiritual benefit.

"It has come to my bearing that there were certain ones in your town who intended to disturb, and break up my service, but, looking you over as a body of stalwart men, I cannot believe that any of you would degrade yourselves by attempting such a heinous and disgraceful offense.

"All I ask of you is your kind attention, for a little while; I will not detain you long, to-day, and when you go away from my little church, I think you will feel better for having come. I will preach you a short sermon from Matthew, fifth chapter, sixth verse."

There was a faint murmur of applause, but otherwise, the audience remained perfectly tractable, and stared interestedly at the red-headed gentleman in the pulpit, who, as one miner expressed it "could rattle off sech all-fired dickshunny langwidge."

The Reverend Jimson began his sermon in a clear, comprehensive manner, and spoke with much eloquence.

Those who had expected to hear a dry, uninteresting discourse, were agreeably undeceived, for Jimson's talk was full of interest and suggestiveness, from first to the last, and when he said "Amen," there was terrific applause. Jimson then passed around his plug hat, in lieu of a contribution-box, and the coins poured into it in a stream, until the receptacle became so heavy the toll-taker had to use both hands to prevent a burst.

His success as a preacher, in Pokerville, was established, and who or whatever he might be, whether a regularly ordained minister or not, certain it was he knew how to preach.

While Mr. Jimson was busy taking up the collection, there was a disturbance in the front of the house, caused by the entrance of Screechin' Sam, the bully of the town, who came staggering in, loaded up with "tanglefoot."

"Hyer I come!" he roared, "Screechin' Sam, ther Mayor of Pokerville, an' I'm jest goin' ter bu'st up this beer Sunday-meetin' bizzness, right at ther start. I'm boss o' this burg, I am, an' by thunder, I'm ther galoot as is goin' ter boss et, too, you bet! Ther ain't ter be no sich capers cut up aroun' hyer on Sunday. Whoop-ee! Whar's thet preacher? Jist show him to me, 'til I mount him!"

"Put him out! put Screechin' Sam out!" cried a chorus of voices.

"Ay! ay! put him out!" shouted the Reverend Jim in vigorous tones. "His presence here defiles the house of God!"

"Whoop-ee! yes; jest come an' put him out ef ye think ye can!" screamed the Screecher. "Some o' ye big duffers jist waltz right for'a'd an' try et, an' cuss my boots ef I don't give ther gospel chap a chance ter preach er funeral sermon. I ain't afraid o' ye, neither one ner all. Ef ye want ter put me out, why don't some o' ye ornery skunks git a move on ye? I'm ready an' willin'."

The audience made no move, at which Sam burst into a roar of boisterous laughter.

He was a very giant in size, and as repulsive of aspect as he was huge.

It was evident every one in Pokerville stood in fear of him, for no one made a move toward ejecting him from the building.

"Will not some one put that ruffian out?" cried the Reverend Jimson. "Such profanity is horrifying in this place."

"Why don't you come an' do et, ye mealy-mouthed monkey?" roared Sam. "I'll break yer back fer yer quicker than a cat kin wink."

Dick foresaw here an opportunity to "make himself solid" with the citizens of Pokerville, and, as he had no fear of the Screecher, he quietly stepped forward, seized the bully by the nape of his neck and the seat of his trowsers, wheeled him face about, deliberately ran him out of the church, and gave him a "boot-lift" into the street.

Screechin' Sam went headlong to the ground upon his face, and, his head coming in contact with a boulder, he was knocked senseless.

Of course this little episode caused every one to pour from the church, to see what the result would be, and when it was discovered that all the fight was temporarily knocked out of the tough, there was a buzz of applause, and miner-gambler, and tough in general, insisted on shaking hands with the hero of the day.

Dick could do no less than accommodate all the enthusiasts, and, by the time they were all done, his hand felt as though it was paralyzed.

Last, but not least, came the Reverend Jim Jimson, Screechin' Sam in the meantime having been carried away by some of his chums.

"Young man, you're a brick!" Jimson exclaimed; "you are a brick! You did what none of the rest of them dared do, though they were bigger and stronger than you. Accept my thanks, and, if you have no objections, what is your name?"

"Richard M. Bristol. Out here in the West, I am perhaps better known as Deadwood Dick, Junior."

They shook hands, and then, after a few words, the detective bade Mr. Jimson good-day, and walked away, the observed of all observers.

A man who had the nerve to give the grand bounce to a tough of Screechin' Sam's desperate character, was a person extraordinary, and one to be looked upon as something phenomenal. At least, so said the Pokervilleans.

CHAPTER VI.

FRISKY FAN AT HOME.

A NEW hotel—a great barn-like structure, built partly of stone and partly of rough boards, and roofed with slabs—had been recently erected in Pokerville by an enterprising German named Hans Schleck, and it was here Deadwood Dick had taken up his quarters.

His room was unplastered and uncarpeted, but it was furnished with a comfortable bed, a wash-stand and a chair, about all he had a reason to expect.

After bidding good-day to Mr. Jimson, he went back to the hotel, sought his room, and was soon soundly asleep.

He did not awaken for several hours.

When he did awaken, he did not immediately get up, but lay pondering over something that had occurred while he was listening to the Rev. Jimson's sermon.

"It may be but a coincidence," he mused, "but I could not help noticing it, just the same. The hair of Scarlet Seth, the road-agent, and the hair of the Reverend Mr. Jimson, is of exactly the same color; then, too, their voices are strangely alike. Can it be that the preacher and the road-agent are one and the same person?"

"If so, Jimson is playing a shrewd role, and for an important purpose. I've a notion I'll try and keep an eye on his movements while I'm looking around for old Snip of St. Louis. That reminds me: I'd better be making some inquiries after Mr. Snip."

He made a hasty toilet and went down-stairs, arriving just in time for dinner.

After dinner he once more sauntered out upon the street.

There was but one street in Pokerville, and this did not deserve the credit of the name. All the buildings in the town, with one exception, were on this street, and this made the common thoroughfare quite long, for, as a usual thing, considerable space lay between each shanty or house.

The exception mentioned was the residence of David Dale, which stood upon the knoll, several hundred yards from the street.

As Dick sauntered along, he kept his eye upon the signs over the doors of the various saloons, and soon came to a place, neater of appearance than the rest, over the door of which was a sign, containing the single word:

FERRIS."

This, then, was Frisky Fan's resort.

"I reckon I'll go in and see Miss Ferris," concluded the detective, after a moment's deliberation. "Maybe she can give me some news of old Snip."

Entering the saloon, he found himself in a cozy room, not large, but well fitted up for that remote region.

There was a little bar, a faro table, half a dozen deal tables and plenty of chairs.

Only about a dozen people were present, and these were playing poker at the smaller tables. The faro table was idle.

The bar was presided over by a colored young man in a dandified costume.

Frisky Fan was sauntering about the room, smoking a cigarette, and evidently trying to kill time by doing nothing.

The moment she espied Dick, however, she came quickly forward and extended her hand.

"I am glad to see you, Mr.—Mr.—I don't think I know your name," she said.

"My name is Richard Bristol," Dick replied, shaking hands with her.

"Richard Bristol," she echoed, gazing at him fixedly. "I've often heard of a man of that name who is noted for his detective exploits. He is also called by another name—that of Deadwood Dick, Junior. But I reckon you are not that person. I've seen him in my dreams

often, but he always wore a nice mustache and long hair."

"It strikes me I have heard of the fellow," Dick replied. "Kind of a wild, dare-devil sort of a cuss, I suppose?"

"Yes, but as fearless and courageous as a lion. Do you know, I traveled miles on horseback, a couple of years ago, to get a look at him? But when I got where I expected to find him, he wasn't there."

"Indeed! You must have taken a great interest in one who did not know that such a person as you was in existence."

"I've long had a desire to see this Deadwood Dick—the hero of my dreams. But, come and sit down, and we will have some wine while we chat. Business is always dull with me on Sunday, because I don't allow the faro-table to be run. Gus! open a bottle of wine."

Miss Ferris led the way to a retired table, where they could converse without being overheard.

"I was just tickled near to death," she went on, volubly, "when I saw you pitch Screechin' Sam into the street. He's been the terror of the town ever since I have been here, and every one has been scared to death of him, for he'd just as lief kill a man as to look at him. You didn't seem at all scared."

"No use of being afraid of a big blow-hard like Sam," Dick replied, with a shrug. "Give him one good licking, and make him know that you're the boss, and he will be as meek as a spring lamb. It's the sly, quiet, sneak-rascal one wants to be on the lookout for."

"You want to keep your eyes wide-awake, nevertheless. I've been in Pokerville a year, and I know Screechin' Sam better than you do. He's a desperado from the roots of his hair to the tips of his toes, and he'll keep you in sweet remembrance. If he can't get even with you in one way, he will in another, never you doubt."

"Oh, I'm not afraid of him," Dick assured. "I've had scrapes with bigger men, and come out right-side-up-with-care. It will be Mr. Screecher who will need the services of Parson Jimson at a funeral, if he comes monkeying around me too much. By the way, Miss Ferris, what do you think of the Reverend Jim Jimson?"

"He is a queer character!" Fan replied, "and I don't know what to make of him. He is certainly well versed in the Bible, whether he's a preacher or a pirate."

"You are right, there. He evidently knew what he was talking about. By the way, Miss Ferris—"

"Call me Fanny, please, or Frisky Fan, as you like. Miss is good enough for rich men's daughters—like old Dale's, for instance—who can sit in the parlor and nurse poodle dogs."

"Very well, Fanny. Then you must also call me Dick."

"Dick! Dick Bristol? Gracious! I believe you are Deadwood Dick, after all!"

"You believe aright, for I am that very individual!"

"My!" Fan dropped her gaze, while the color mounted to her temples, for she remembered her avowed infatuation for the dashing detective!

"Fauny," Dick pursued, pretending not to notice her confusion, "I have several questions to ask, which you may or may not be able to answer, as the case may be. Will you answer those that you can?"

"Of course I will," she replied, smilingly.

"Well, the first question is, have you ever heard of Scarlet Seth, the road-agent?"

"Well, I should say I had. He's been cavorting around these parts for six months past. We have but two stages a week, but he manages to strike them, between here and Bullionville, pretty regular."

"How long has this thing been going on?"

"Over six months."

"Second question: How long has the Reverend Jim Jimson been here?"

"Since last Monday."

"Does any one know where he came from?"

"I guess not. That seems to be a sort of mystery, if I'm any judge."

"Third question: I suppose, in a camp so small as this, the arrival of a stranger is immediately noticed. Do many strangers visit Pokerville?"

"Very few—so few, in fact, that it's a sight good for weak eyes to see one ride into camp."

"How many strangers have been here, lately?"

"Not one in a month, until the preacher came last Monday. You're the second one."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, for I keep pretty well posted on what is going on."

Dick reflected.

"A man named Snip, from St. Louis should have been here, ere this!" he remarked, "for he started days ahead of me. He holds heavy stock in the Electric Mine, and was coming on to investigate matters."

"Why, David Dale claims to be sole owner of the Electric."

"Exactly, but he isn't. He induced Snip to invest heavily in the stock; then, after the first year, he reported to Snip that the mine had played out and had been abandoned. Snip, of course, considered his stock worthless, but still hung on to his certificates. Recently, he learned that the mine had never been abandoned at all, but had kept right on producing, and coincing money for David Dale. This naturally set Snip on fire, so to speak, and he packed up and let sail for Pokerville, leaving word for me to follow him."

"Did David Dale know he was coming?"

"I think not."

"For if he did, the chances are that Mr. Snip got snipped before he got here. Dave Dale isn't a man who will brook any interference. He's making too much money out of the Electric to admit the claims of a second party, and don't you forget that! He'd find some way to get rid of any one whose claim was likely to dispute his sole ownership."

"Do you really think he is as bad as that?"

"I don't think—I know it. There are mighty few people in this camp, who don't hate him for the meanness of his ways, even though most of them have to depend upon him for work. No! no! Deadwood, if Dave Dale ever got an inkling that your Mr. Snip was coming to Pokerville, Mr. Snip will never get here!"

"Hum!" and Dick relapsed into another fit of reflection. Finally, he asked:

"Where is the nearest point where I can reach a telegraph office communicating with a main line?"

"Bullionville, eight miles to the south."

"Eight miles, eh?" and Dick again meditated. "I don't suppose you know of a thoroughly trustworthy person I could get to take a message there for me, and see that it was sent over the wires, without delay?"

"Yes. I reckon I do," Frisky Fan replied. "I will go for you, if satisfactory!"

"You?"

"Yes. I really have some business in Bullionville, that ought to be attended to, and I can kill two birds with one stone. And I should be very glad to be of any service to the hero of my dreams!"

Dick flushed, and Frisky Fan laughed, heartily.

"There, now, we are square!" she cried. "You confused me, a bit ago. But, what do you say? Shall I take the message?"

"If you will, certainly. But, how about your place, here?"

"Oh! Gus can run it as well as I. So, write your telegram and I will be off, at once. I shall no doubt be detained in Bullionville, until noon, to-morrow. By that time, the answer to your telegram will probably be back, and I can fetch it with me."

"You are exceedingly kind!" Dick said, "and I will pay you well for your services."

"You'll not pay me a cent! Gus, order my Black Beauty saddled and brought around."

So Gus put on his hat, and hastened from the saloon, while the detective took some blank paper from his pocket, and wrote out the following message:

"MISS SALLY SNIP,

No.—Missouri Ave., St Louis, Mo.:—
Send me by return telegraph, description of your father's person, and especially of his facial appearance.

"R. M. BRISTOL,

"Bullionville, Nevada."

"There. Have that sent!" Dick enjoined.

"Here are ten dollars. If that don't cover the expenses, let me know on your return. If anything is left out of it, drink to the health of the hero of your dreams!"

"You bet I'll not forget that part!" Frisky Fan replied, with a smile. "If you will excuse me now, I will prepare for my journey."

She vanished through a side door opening off the saloon, and was gone about five minutes. When she returned she was ready for the start.

There was but little change in her appearance.

She had exchanged her shoes for a pair of patent-leather top-boots, and her sombrero for a red-and-white jockey cap, and looked a veritable queen of the turf.

A belt about her waist contained a pair of re-

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volvers, and slung to her back was a silver-mounted repeating-rifle.

"Well, I'm off now," she said, extending her hand to Dick, "and you may look for me back to-morrow afternoon without fail."

Dick pressed her hand warmly, and escorting her from the saloon, assisted her to mount.

A moment more and she was off like the wind.

And a dashing picture she made, for it took but a glance to see that she was an accomplished and daring horsewoman.

CHAPTER VII.

A FIGHTING PREACHER.

AFTER the departure of Frisky Fan, Dick returned to her saloon to think over what he was next to do.

If Frisky Fan was right, that only two strangers had recently entered the town—the preacher and himself—then it was certain Simeon Snip had not yet reached Pokerville.

But why not?

He had had a week the start of the detective, and should have reached his destination the same length of time in advance.

Had he been waylaid and killed?

Had by any chance the news of his coming reached the ears of David Dale, and had he caused the irate St. Louisian to be put temporarily or wholly out of the way?

There seemed nothing for Dick to do except to await an answer to his St. Louis telegram. Then, if by chance Mr. Snip should be in Pokerville, Dick presumed he would have no difficulty in locating him.

It was while these matters were being turned over in his mind that his reflections were disturbed by an exclamation from Augustus, the darky bartender of the establishment.

"Hello! hello! dar's gwine to be fun now, fo' suah! Dar gwine to be a fight 'tween Screechin' Sam an' de preacher!"

Deadwood Dick sprung from his chair, and hurriedly left the saloon, to find that Augustus had spoken the truth.

Down by Mike Quincy's Pokerville Club, two-thirds of the population of the town were gathered on either side of the street, while in the middle of the highway Screechin' Sam and the Reverend Jim Jonson were stripping to the waist, preparatory for battle.

Dick hurried to the spot.

"Why, friend Jimson, what does this mean?" he demanded, approaching the preacher.

"It means," replied Jimson, savagely, "that I wasn't brought up in the woods to be scared out by a screech-owl. This cuss they call Screechin' Sam, allows that the town ain't big enough to hold us both, and so we're goin' to decide which one must go."

"Thet's ther music, you bet!" roared the bully, who did not appear to recognize in Deadwood Dick the man who had chucked him out of the church. "Thar can't be no preacher sagatiate around this burg, as long as I'm boss, you bet! And I'm boss 'til I run across the rantankerous galoot what can lick me. When I git licked, I'll drop my tail-feathers, and slope!"

Some of the bully's cronies cheered at this, but it was only a feeble cheer.

"Well, gentlemen, I hope to see a fair and square fight, if there's to be a fight at all!" Deadwood Dick remarked.

"And that's what it's got to be!" declared Mike Quincy, stepping forward. "I'm to second the preecher, an' Sandy McPherson will do the same for the Screecher."

"Who's to be referee?" demanded McPherson.

"I choose that galoot!" cried Screechin' Sam, pointing to Dick. "He aire a stranger in this burg, I allow, and therefore, a disinterested party."

"What's your choice?" Quincy asked of Jimson.

"The stranger will suit me well enough," was the reply.

"Very well, then, the stranger will act as referee," Quincy announced. "What might yer name be, stranger?"

"Deadwood Dick is what they generally call me."

"All right, Deadwood Dick is to be referee," Quincy called out. "Now, get ready, gentlemen, an' don't keep the spectators waiting, for they're jest b'ilin' an' sloppin' over the sides to see ye git to work and maul each other."

The men were not long in getting ready.

They were soon stripped to the waist, and, as they were to fight with bare knuckles, there was nothing more to be done.

Sandy McPherson, who had seen his day in

the prize-ring, had marked out a twenty-four foot ring, in the dust of the street.

Both of the "to be" contestants were of about the same age and height, but Screechin' Sam weighed the most by long odds. His knotty breast looked as if it might withstand the blow of a sledge-hammer.

Physically speaking, Parson Jimson could not "hold a patch to him," in the matter of muscular development; Nevertheless, the parson's form was not deficient in muscle, and an expert judge would have decided that he was wiry, supple, quick, cautious, and a telling hitter.

When the Screecher had sized up his antagonist, he gave a sniff of disgust.

"I say, preecher, I allow et ain't hardly a fair shake 'twixt you an' me. I kinder feels ashamed to hammer away at a skinny, narrow-chested galoot like you, I do, by thunder! Why, ef I war ter hit ye one good punch in the ribs, you'd fall apart, sure."

"Well, try it, and see!" the Reverend Jimson, replied, grimly. "I've known people to get stung, who fooled with the business end of a hornet. Haven't you?"

"Get to your places, gentlemen!" called out Deadwood Dick, who stood with a cocked revolver in his right hand, and his watch in his left. "This fight is to be conducted on scientific principles, and is to be in rounds of three minutes, with one minute between each round. And, please understand this: If I detect any underhand or treacherous business, I'll shoot the man down like a dog, be he saint or sinner!"

Then, after a moment:

"Time! Go!"

The two men advanced toward one another.

It was a strange sight, to see the Reverend Jim Jonson, who, only a short time before, had been delivering gospel to the people, now stripped for affray, and ready to "put up his dukes" in the pugilistic arena.

The two men met, and got down to business, without any parley or nonsense.

The Screecher led with his left, and followed with his right, both terrific blows, but all they touched was empty air, for the parson had leaped nimbly to one side, and with his right he dealt the Screecher a blow in the jaw that made the bully stagger.

They finished out the remainder of that round, sparring for an opening.

In the second round, the Screecher got in two clever licks upon Jimson's cheek.

In the third round the fighting was hot and heavy, but about even, with the odds if anything in the Screecher's favor.

Among the audience, on either side of the street, betting had already begun, and the odds were two to one in favor of the bully.

Fourth round: Jimson forced the fighting, and drew first blood by giving the Screecher a terrible crack alongside the nose.

In the fifth, sixth and seventh rounds, neither of the combatants did each other any particular injury, as both sparred very cleverly for points.

Whether or no Jimson had received any previous pugilistic schooling, was, of course not known, but for a man who dished out gospel for the benefit of sinners, he made a very good showing as a fighter.

The eighth round pretty effectually settled which way the battle was going. It was the fiercest of the series, both men receiving severe punishment, the round ending by the Parson knocking his adversary flat upon his back, with a stinging left-hander.

The Screecher got up very "groggy," but went at it with renewed determination, when the ninth round was called.

But, again he went to ground, twice in succession, from the terrific blows of the fighting preacher.

Bettors, who had been laying two one on Screechin' Sam, now tried to hedge, but found they could not, for, in the opinion of every one who had witnessed the battle, the bully was done for.

The tenth round settled the whole business.

The first clip he got at his antagonist, the parson caught him in under the left jaw, and once more laid him out in the dirt.

This time Screechin' Sam did not rise to explain, and for the good reason that he was as insensible as a log.

It was a clean case of knock out, and the bully of Pokerville was beaten.

CHAPTER VIII.

MINE-OWNER AND ROAD-AGENT.

WE will now return to the parlor of David Dale's residence, where we last saw the rich

mine-owner and Scarlet Seth, the road-agent, confronting each other.

"Sit down! sit down! and take things easy," the road-agent commanded, coolly. "We can talk over matters just as well while sitting, as while standing."

"I have no matters to talk over with you!" thundered Dale. "So begone! or I'll ring for my hired man, and have you thrown out."

"Ah! yes, so you say, but, what will I be doing all this time?" and the road-agent patted his revolver, significantly. "You'd have a jolly good time, throwing me out, David Dale! Now, the best and most sensible thing you can do is to sit down, or this popgun of mine might go off, by accident, and something awful might happen. The durned critter gits unruly and impatient sometimes, and takes matters into its own hands, and goes off, of its own sweet accord."

Dale sunk into an easy-chair, and Scarlet Seth became seated, close by.

"Now, to business. I understand that Mr. Simeon Snip, of St. Louis, is about to pay you a visit, to investigate matters connected with the management of the Electric, in which he is a heavy stockholder. I presume you will be glad to welcome Mr. Snip!"

"Oh, without a doubt!"

"I dare say Mr. Snip will likewise be eager to interview you!" the road-agent pursued. "It appears that Mr. Snip, of St. Louis, has not been receiving any profit from his investment, for several years, having been laboring under the delusion that the Electric had been played out, and long ago had been abandoned. This delusion was caused by the false report of one malicious schemer, named David Dale."

"Who the devil are you, that you know so much?" the mine magnate growled, savagely.

"I am Scarlet Seth, the road agent!" was the reply, "and I am generally supposed to know about as much about other peoples' business as they know themselves. Queer, isn't it? I never bother my head to search after such news, but it seems to come to me voluntarily. But I was speaking of Mr. Snip."

"The delusion under which Mr. Snip has been laboring for some years past, has at length been dispelled, and he knows the truth, and is coming West to demand a settlement. He knows that, while he has been receiving no profit from the output of the Electric Mine, and has considered his stock valueless, you have been working the mine for all it was worth, and feathering your nest to the tune of from twenty-five to thirty thousand dollars a year."

"Now, Mr. Snip, of St. Louis, takes a keen interest in this case, but, being a church member, and a man of forgiving spirit, no doubt, when you fill his pockets with rightful dividends, he will be willing to overlook any past discrepancies on your part. Honesty is the best policy at all times, and frequently saves a man from getting his neck entangled in the meshes of a rope connected with the limb of a tree!"

"What the deuce do you mean?" Dale demanded, eying the road-agent savagely.

"I mean this!" Scarlet Seth replied grimly. "When Mr. Snip arrives in town and demands a settlement, he must have it, or your life won't be worth a picayune. Every cent due him you must pay over, or one of these fine mornings you'll find yourself dangling from the limb of a tree, the laughing-stock for crows, buzzards, etcetera. So saith I, Scarlet Seth, the road-agent!"

"In the second place, I want to impress upon your active mind another piece of information, and that is this: I am aware that you not intend to make restitution to Mr. Snip without a struggle. You would even stoop to do murder, before you would yield up any interest in the Electric Mine. It is your intention that Mr. Snip shall not enter this town without being intercepted. So you have stationed a watch at every approach to Pokerville to stop Mr. Snip, and turn him over to your tender mercies."

"Now, let me tell you one thing, David Dale, and that isn't two: If any harm comes to Simeon Snip, I'll put you in urgent need of a coffin as sure as I am Scarlet Seth, the road-agent. Do you hear me?"

"Yes, I hear you, but that does not signify that I heed you. I have no bad intentions toward Mr. Snip, and if he comes to Pokerville, we no doubt can amicably adjust our affairs without the interference of desperadoes and the like. Your interest in the welfare of Mr. Snip seems something remarkable, considering that you are an outlaw and a cut-throat."

"Have a care!" Scarlet Seth cried sharply, "or you'll regret your words. I haven't any great degree of love for you, David Dale, and

you'd best not arouse my wrath, for I'm a bad man when I'm r'iled, and don't you forget it. I may be an outlaw, but never a cut-throat. But, if you don't mend your ways, there will be some throat-squeezing!"

"Well, now that you have unburdened, I hope you will be kind enough to take your departure!"

"Not yet. I have another matter to speak of—of Frisky Fan."

"What of her?"

"A great deal. Your son Julian is enamored of the girl, who is really pretty and charming, and he is hardly to be blamed for his passion. But, he is not the only one of Frisky Fan's admirers. You, too, are stuck on that pretty face and figure—you, an old reprobate, who ought to be thinking of what is in store for you in the great hereafter, instead of languishin' after young women."

"Now! Let me tell you one thing. Frisky Fan is not for you. Neither is she for your son. So take my advice and keep away from her. In fact, I command you to keep away from her. She is nothing to you, nor ever can be!"

Dale sneered.

"So you've got an iron in the fire, eh?" he said, sarcastically. "One would suppose, by your talk, that you held a mortgage on the girl!"

"I do, in this much that I promised her mother on her dying bed that, outlaw though I was, I would see to it that no scoundrel should entrap her daughter."

"Humph! very romantic, indeed!" David Dale again sneered. "You are quite a Don Quixote, to be sure. As for my being stuck on the girl, you are decidedly off your reckoning, for I have neither admiration nor respect for her. She is who?—the daughter of some vagrant, no doubt. The very calling she has chosen bespeaks that fact."

"Yes, the daughter of a vagrant, David Dale, and upon your soul rests the responsibility of the making of that vagrant!"

"What do you mean?" the mine-owner gasped, turning a shade paler.

"I mean," returned Scarlet Seth, "that, years ago, you had a sister, who made an unfortunate marriage, to a man who turned out to be a base adventurer. After their first child was born he deserted his wife, and fled for parts unknown, leaving his wife and child homeless and penniless. Your sister had no place to go to—no one to turn to but you."

"So she came to you, and implored you to take her in. She was a weak, sickly little woman, unable to work, even had she not been encumbered with her child. After she had pleaded with you long and piteously, you at last consented to take her in, albeit it was with ill grace that you did so, and her life in your magnificent home was anything but pleasant."

"She was coldly treated, and made to bitterly feel that she was a burden, and unwelcome. The climax came at last. You came home one night under the influence of drink. Usually of an ugly temper, even when sober, you were a savage when drunk."

"On this night in particular you were ferocious, and found fault with everybody and everything."

"Having gone the rounds, you at last vented your hellish spite upon your sister. You, David Dale, who claim relationship to the civilized human race, you deliberately kicked your own sister out of your house, into the stormy, wintry night, and flung her child after her!"

"Do you remember that inhuman act? Ah! yes, I see you do, by the pallor upon your face. You never saw or heard from your sister after that night. You believed, you hoped, that she had perished in the snow!"

"But, she wandered far away, with her babe in her arms, and was at last taken in by goodly-disposed people, who nursed her back to strength, and took up a collection for her, raising a sufficient sum of money to carry her far from the scenes of her childhood."

"Eventually she joined a strolling band of Gypsies, and thereafter led a nomadic existence. Six months ago she died, in a deserted cabin, on the outskirts of Virginia City, and I attended her in her last hours. She told me her pitiful story, told me where I would find her daughter, whom she had given another name, and made me promise to look after her. Then she died, and I gave her a decent burial. Now, David Dale, what have you to say for yourself?"

"Only that I have nothing to regret," was the grim response. "You needn't have taken the pains to have told me this story, for it does not interest me in the least—not in the least, sir!"

And he smote the table with his fist.

"Only, that if the girl gambler is my sister's child, I am not much surprised, for I could not expect an offspring of a man such as my sister's husband was, to amount to much. Blood will tell, especially bad blood. That's all I have to say. I do not care to discuss the subject any longer. If you have aired yourself of your opinions to your satisfaction, why the sooner you take your departure, the better!"

"I don't know that I am very particular about tearing myself away. I always enjoy the society of cultured gentlemen like yourself, I do, really."

"Confound it, will you not go?"

"When I get ready!"

"What more do you want, curse you? Haven't you already driven me nearly mad?"

"Have I? Well, I am so sorry that you don't appreciate my society, and I might as well go. Let me warn you, however: I am dead on to your racket, and if harm comes to Simeon Snip, I'll make it necessary for your family to purchase a coffin for you; for I'll not only avenge old Simeon's wrongs, but those of the mother of Frisky Fan! Good-by!"

And turning, Scarlet Seth left the house, through the open bay window, as he had entered.

CHAPTER IX.

SNIP AND SON.

THE fight was over, and the Reverend Jimson was the hero of the day.

Jimson might have preached the Gospel in Pokerville 'til doomsday without acquiring the "hold" on the hearts of the Pokervillians that "thrashing" Screechin' Sam gave him.

"He's the stuff!"

"Preecher? Why, that feller's a reg'lar prize fighter, you bet!"

"He's a Jim-dandy, anyhow!"

"Bet he is, an' he's all-fired flip with his tongue, too. Why, I uts'r go to church, in Boston, 'fore I kim out heer, an' I never heerd a parson as ked spout facts about the Bible beter'n Jimson."

"Gee! but, didn't he whale the Screecher, tho', boys? Ef Screecher, or any o' his pals, offers ter harm the parson, we'll skin 'em alive. Hey?"

"You bet! Hurrah!"

And the response was a tremendous cheer.

"An' that feller what was referee! He's game!"

"Game is no name for it!" averred one old-timer, who had visited every mining-town in the West, in his perambulations. "I know that chap or know of him. He's one of the smartest detectives in the West, or in the United States, for that matter."

"Detec'ire? Who is he?" asked the dozen or more curious ones, who had crowded around the "old-timer."

"His name is Bristol, but he is better known as Deadwood Dick, Jr. Oh! he's a Winchester, and don't you forget it!"

"What's a detective doin' heer in Pokerville?"

The "old timer" shrugged his shoulders, and glanced toward the house on the hill.

"Thar may be su'thin' wrong wi' Dave Dale's bizness transactions, as needs investigatin'!" he replied. "I've noticed the boss ain't so high-spirited for a few days past, as before," added another.

Such were the remarks that passed around among the crowd after the battle.

In the mean time, Mike Quincy had literally corralled Deadwood Dick and the parson in a room just off the bar-room of the Pokerville Club.

"Gentlemen," said Quincy, "I am a gambler and an all-around sport, and I admire game men, black or white, drunk or sober, and I have the honor of being in your company. I ain't no slouch, ef I ain't exactly a saint, an' I'm goin' to treat ye to a testimonial o' my respect and admiration. For two teetotal strangers to walk into this town, an' give Screechin' Sam the dose he's got, all within a few hours, is miraculous, and entitles ye to the best the house affords. So, while the preacher is pullin' on his duds, I'll go order a feed."

And the bluff but genial proprietor of the Pokerville Club vanished through the doorway, while the Rev. Jim Jimson proceeded to array himself once more in his clerical-looking garments.

Deadwood Dick watched him in silence.

The Reverend Jim had not suffered much through the conflict. His left cheek had swollen a little, his lip was slightly cut, and his nose was somewhat skinned; otherwise, he was none the worse for the tussle.

"You're a daisy, parson," Dick said at last. "I must admit I was never more surprised in my life, to see the way you wallop that tough. Where did you get your science?"

"Oh! I got it all right. I'm not a spring chicken, by any means."

"No, I should judge not. You are an old rooster, rather!"

By the time Jimson was dressed, Mike Quincy returned, accompanied by his negro servant, who bore a tray full of steaming viands and three bottles of wine.

If anything, Quincy was a good liver, as was amply shown by the present "lay-out" of stewed venison, roast quail, corn cake, good butter, and excellent coffee—and all produced in a remarkably short space of time.

It was a "feed" fit for a king, so to speak, and Dick and the Reverend Jim did full justice to it, while Quincy was not backward in helping to dispose of the dinner.

"Screechin' Sam will hardly be likely to screech so much, for awhile," he observed. "He's nigh about run this town for a couple of years—he and Dave Dale."

"What sort of a man is this Dale?" Dick took occasion to ask. "I am somewhat interested in him."

"He's a tyrant, from the word go. He's a hard man to deal with, and havin' plenty o' sugar, he's pretty much his own way, fer it's money that buys the boys here in Pokerville, and if Dave Dale should want one put out o' his way to-morrow, he could easy find plenty o' men as would do the job, neat and scientific. Tharfore, about the likeliest thing we kin do is to keep on the right side of him."

"On my way to this camp," remarked Dick, "I had an interview with a road-agent who called himself Scarlet Seth. Do you know anything about him?"

"Do I? Well, I reckon. I knew him, afore he went inter the line o' trade. He was a good sort o' feller, but purty wild. Finally he got into a quarrel, over at Bullionville, and in the fracas killed three men. The marshal got after him, then, and he had to take to cover. Since then his only way of making a living seems to have been by holdin' up stages, and stoppin' hessback travelers. I haven't seen him for some time now. The last time I saw him, was one night when I was about closin' up the shebang. He waltzed in, unexpectedly, and invited me ter divy up the receipts of the day. As my revolver wasn't handy, and his was, I most assuredly came to time, with the best of grace. Even after I had given the cuss a matter of fifty dollars, do ye know he had the nerve to demand a drink, and induce me ter jine him? I didn't want to, but the muzzle o' his revolver looked so cold and persuasive, that I reckoned it would be healthy for me to drink. Oh! Sam Dale is a daisy, and no mistake!"

"Sam Dale?" echoed the Reverend Jimson, springing to his feet. "Ye don't mean Sam Dale from St. Louis?"

"Dunno whar he cum from," Mike replied, "but I do know that, when I know'd him, before he took ter the road, he signed hisself Samuel Seth Dale. After he got inter the "liftin'" bizness, he called hisself Scarlet Seth."

"My own long lost brother-in-law!" murmured the Reverend Jim, and he shook with emotion.

Mike Quincy regarded the preacher with some surprise, but his surprise was nothing to compare with that of Deadwood Dick.

To Dick an unexpected revelation was unfolded. Was the Reverend Jim Jimson, in reality, Mr. Simeon Snip, of St. Louis? If so, why this singular masquerade?

The Reverend Jim speedily recovered from his emotion.

"I know, gentlemen," he said, "that you will not betray my secret. I am not Jimson, but Simeon Snip of St. Louis. My present masquerade is for a purpose. When you mentioned Samuel Seth Dale, you mentioned my own brother-in-law, whom I have not heard from for years, and when it became known to me that he was a road-agent, it rather knocked me over. If you will not mention that I am other than Jimson, you will confer a great favor."

"I'm mum as a clam!" Quincy declared. "I'd give my last shirt to the man as can do up Screechin' Sam the way you did!"

"Mr. Snip can depend on my secrecy," Dick said, "as I journeyed all the way here from Cincinnati especially to find Mr. Snip!"

The Reverend Jim looked amazed.

"Ye don't mean that Clincher sent ye?" he ejaculated.

"That's precisely what I do mean," Dick re-

plied. "I left Cincinnati immediately after Mr. Clincher received your letter, and went to St. Louis. There your daughter informed me of your departure for Pokerville, and I followed, according to the instructions you had left behind."

"Well, by Jerusalem! I'm glad to meet you, me boy!" and Snip reached his hand over the table to "shake." "I had no idear you was the chap, although I saw ye war purty smart when ye run that cuss cut of my church. I cottoned to you at once after that. Mr. Quincy, this feller is a hoss, and don't you forget it, or else old Clincher wouldn't have sent him after me. Clincher is a shrewd old cuss, and has made a pile o' money, an' he's a friend o' mine, tho' we uster fight like cats and dogs when we went to school together. By gracious, Deadwood Dick, I'm glad to see ye! Shake again!"

And they did shake.

And the dinner passed off right merrily.

CHAPTER X.

MAPPING OUT PLANS.

DINNER dispatched, Quincy excused himself on the plea of business, and took his leave.

This left Snip and Deadwood Dick alone.

"Well, Mr. Snip, I have followed you all the way here to Nevada, as you requested, according to your daughter; now, what can I do for you?" demanded the detective.

"Well, not much at present. And yet you can, too. I don't think David Dale knows I am in town. By the way, did my daughter give you an inkling of the object o' my visit here?"

"Yes. I pretty thoroughly understand your mission. Your daughter posted me, so far as she was able. But I never should have believed you were Mr. Snip but for your own admission, even though I had a suspicion that your Jimson racket was a blind. I sent a messenger to Bullionville to telegraph to St. Louis for a description of you, so I would know you when you arrived. Of course that description is now unnecessary."

"Just so. Well, the only way to git even with this man Dale is by strategy. He's a shrewd rascal, and, as near as I kin find out, he purty nigh runs this town. Leastwise, he has the rough element under his thumb, and when he whistles they ans'ers his call like so many slaves. Money will do a heap in a town like this, and I reckon Dave Dale has got the bulge on me in that respect.

"I sized that up, immediately upon my arrival here, before I had conceived the ministerial dodge. I wanted time to look up things before I made an attack. As Dave and I had not met, since our boyhood days, I counted on it that he would not know me, as I have changed greatly in appearance. So I started the church racket, and licked Screechin' Sam, in order to get the gang on my side.

"But, now that you're here, I'll kind o' lay back on my ears, and let you do the most o' the figgerin'."

"Have you seen David Dale?"

"Not yet."

"Do you not think he would recognize you, if you were to meet?"

"I don't think so. I have changed wonderfully, since he last saw me."

"Do you think he has any idea of your coming to Pokerville?"

"I think not. He may have had an emissary in St. Louis, but I think that hardly probable."

"How was it, may I ask?" questioned the detective, "that, not having seen this man Dale, you intrusted money for investment to him?"

"Because I believed him square and honest. He once wrote me from Milwaukee, of a good thing in corn—'twas a short crop that year. I forwarded him a thousand dollars, and he nearly doubled it. After that, I natterly had confidence in him. 'Pears to me, now, though, as if he might hav made as much off o' my thousand as I did, if not more. Anyhow, he's a condemned rascal, and when he's got old Snip after him he's got a tiger!"

"What is your mode of procedure?"

"I'll leave a good deal of that to you. But I will give you an outline of my ideas. In the first place, I want to get hold of the books. Accordin' to my inquiries, Dale keeps a book-keeper, name of Townsend, who does nearly all his business, in the way of taking charge of receipts of the output, paying off the men—well, in fact, he is a general manager. This fellow is dead struck on the girl sport, Frisky Fan."

"Well?"

"This Frisky Fan likes you. There's no denyin' that. I saw it, while preachin' the sermon. I ruther wish my darter had taken a notion to you while ye war in Saint Louie. Anyhow, through Frisky Fan, you might be able to gain access to the books, and estimate what my share of the profits would be, ownin', as I do, two-thirds of stock. Are you cute at figgers?"

"By no means an expert accountant, yet I can add and subtract, and divide," Dick replied, with a smile.

"I reckon so. If old Snip makes a calculation, et generally comes out pretty near pat, and he calculates you've had a good deal of experience in various matters.

"Now, what I want ye ter do, is ter git access to them books if possible wit-out Dave Dale's knowin' it, and give me an idea o' what I want to demand—that is, give me an idea of what the mine has produced in the past three years, in which time I have not received a cent of dividend. If possible, and nothing seems impossible with you detectives, give the books a thorough overhauling, and then I will be able to make an attack direct. Do you think you can do it?"

"I reckon I can manage it somehow."

"Good! You do it, and I'll fix you all right. Mebbe you want some money? If you do, why jest say so, and old Snip will produce."

"Oh! I've money enough for the present!" Dick replied. "Your daughter gave me the money you left behind, and that has more than answered all requirements so far."

"All right. And, now, I've another suggestion to make. I'm pretty positive that Dale don't know I'm in Pokerville. How would it be to throw him off any possible scent?"

"How do you mean?"

"By finding out just how much he does know about my movements."

"That wouldn't be a bad idea; but how am I to find that out?"

"You are a detective. I will leave the matter to your own ingenuity."

Dick reflected a few minutes, with his eyes leveled at the odd countenance of Mr. Snip.

"I have an idea how I can work the matter," he said, at length. "Supposing I go to Mr. Dale, representing myself as a detective from St. Louis. You have left St. Louis, a defaulter, and have made Pokerville your objective destination. I have followed on your track, and, knowing that Mr. Dale was a former acquaintance of yours, I came to him to find out if he knows anything of your whereabouts. In this way I may be able to draw out a few points that will lead to better developments in the case.

"If David Dale is the rogue you take him to be, and I should presume he is, if I get into his confidence, it will be advantageous in working up this case. If he has an idea that you are coming to Pokerville, he will naturally feel desperate, and seek any means of relief. I being a detective, in search of you, will entitle me to his confidence, and, in that way, I think, we can work things nicely."

"As for getting access to the books, I shall have to wait until Frisky Fan returns from Bullionville, so as to get an introduction to this man Townsend."

"Your plan is a capital one. I knew you was a clever chap the first time I set eyes on ye, an' now I'll swar to it. Heer, let's have some o' this wine, or it will spile fer want of usage. Say! what did ye think of my girl Sally? Don't beat her every day, eh?"

"I was very favorably impressed with your daughter," Dick replied, candidly.

"Yas, Sally's a good girl, and loves her dad. I reckon if I never got back to St. Louie, her heart would break. But, now that you're here, detective, to protect me, I reckon old Snip's all right."

"I don't think you are seriously in need of a protector, judging by what I saw in the street awhile ago!" Dick laughed. "A man who can handle himself as well as you did, ought to be able to protect himself."

"Well, I don't allow no big loafers to walk over me, that's flat, an' never did. I ain't built that way."

"Good for you. Well, Frisky Fan won't be back until to-morrow, so I will drop in toward evening, on Mr. Dale, and see what is the state of his pulse."

"Do so, and remember, if by any accident I should suddenly disappear, it is through foul play, and you kin lay et to Dave Dale, or his emissaries. To make matters doubly safe, I here entrust to you the certificates of my stock in the Electric Mine. If I should die, they go to my daughter."

CHAPTER XI.

MISSING!—FAN RETURNS.

It is now two days later, and in that time Simeon Snip had disappeared.

Dick had seen nothing of him since this initial interview.

The Preacher of Pokerville had completely vanished as if the earth had opened and swallowed him up.

Neither had Dick seen anything of David Dale nor of his son, nor of Frisky Fan, who, to all intents, had not yet returned from Bullionville.

Such was the prevailing state of affairs after Parson Jimson's "scrap" with Screeching Sam.

In the prevalent hope that Jimson would turn up, Dick did not bother himself to prosecute any inquiries, but remained quietly at the hotel, until the night of the second day arrived.

Then he began to grow uneasy, and a suspicion of foul play entered his mind. Was it possible that David Dale had learned of Snip's presence, and caused him to be put out of the way?

If he was guilty enough to perpetrate the fraud that was alleged, would he not be likely to protect his ill-gotten gains at any cost?

What was to be done? Dick asked himself.

Should he make a visit to Dale, and plainly accuse him of having been the cause of Simeon Snip's disappearance?

Probably he would meet with a flat denial, and not only that, but it would put David Dale upon his guard. No! that would not do.

He must adopt some other tactics.

He was sitting in the hotel office, weighing the matter in his mind, when, feeling a tap on the shoulder, he looked up, to find Frisky Fan standing by his side!

"Well, well!" he ejaculated. "When did you rain down. I'd about given up ever seeing you again!"

"Is that so? Well, I was detained longer in Bullionville than I expected. I sent your telegram, and here is the answer," and she handed Dick a sealed envelope.

Dick opened the message, and read the following:

"MR. BRISTOL.—My father has red hair, black eyes, left ear chewed off in a set-to with a gang of roughs, nose warped to one side, and a cast in his right eye. I am very anxious to know if you have heard from him, so anxious, that I shall start for Pokerville to-morrow."

"Confound the luck!" Dick ejaculated, putting the message away in his pocket.

"What possesses the girl to come here?"

"Why, has there been any trouble since I went away?"

"Yes, loads of it. You had hardly got out of town when Jimson, the preacher, had a set-to in the street with Screechin' Sam!"

"Who came out winner?"

"Jimson, of course. He is a regular old hyena in a fight, and he did the Screecher up in little or no time."

"Well, what else?"

"After the scrape I had a chat with Jimson, and incidentally learned that he was only playing this preacher racket to give him time to look around and get his bearings. In reality, he is Simeon Snip, of St. Louis, and has come here to get revenue from his stock in the Electric Mine."

Frisky Fan shrugged her pretty shoulders.

"He will have a good time getting it," she declared. "Dale is a thoroughly unscrupulous wretch, and would squeeze a penny to a pulp before he'd let go of it. Where is Mr. Snip?"

"That's more than I can say. I have not seen him since shortly after the fight. I've expected to see him bob up serenely at some unexpected moment, but, somehow, he has failed to materialize. I feel considerably alarmed at his protracted absence."

"Well you may," Fanny declared; "for, if the parson is Mr. Snip, and has disappeared, you can bet he did not do it of his own accord. There's plenty of ruffians in this camp who would do a job for Dave Dale if they were paid for it, and Dale would not begrudge the outlay of a dollar to save a fortune."

"But how are we to prove that Dale had aught to do with Snip's disappearance? We have no absolute proof, and it might not be healthy to openly accuse a man of Dale's wealth and influence."

"True. But we must trust to our cleverness to ferret out the matter. You are a shrewd detective, and with my co-operation ought to be able to run the trail out. Don't you think so?"

"If I had even a slight clew to work on, I should feel more confident than I do at present. How many are there of David Dale's family?"

"Himself and his son, Julian."

"What sort of a chap is Julian?"

"Oh, a pretty good sort of fellow, only that he is rather impetuous and headstrong in his ways, sometimes. I've heard it remarked that he and his father did not get along very well. However, I can't vouch for the truth of the matter, as Julian is rather a reserved man in his private affairs."

"You knew him, then?"

"Well, rather, as both he and his father have been suitors for my hand in marriage, and I judge that is why a coldness has sprung up between them."

Dick gave a little whistle of surprise.

"This disclosure may be of use," he said. "Which of the two do you favor the most?"

"Neither, so far as that is concerned, as I have no present intentions of getting spliced. I am quite satisfied with my freedom."

"Don't you think you might coax or compel some information out of Julian?"

"Possibly. If I can, I will do so. I have private reasons for wishing that no harm should come to Mr. Snip, of St. Louis, and therefore I will help you all I can."

"You would object to making known to me these reasons?"

"Yes, I would. By the way, here comes Julian now. If you will take a seat at another table, I'll have a chat with him."

Dick at once took the cue, so to speak, and rising, sauntered away to the further part of the room, where he dropped into a seat in such a position that he could watch Julian and Fan without being readily seen himself.

Julian entered the hotel office, looking in anything but a pleasant mood; but when he saw Frisky Fan sitting at the table, his countenance lighted up wonderfully, and he took a seat opposite the girl sport in a position that gave Dick a good view of his face, while he could not see that of Frisky Fan.

The two sat and conversed for over an hour, and once Dick fancied that the girl sport gave young Dale a sum of money, although not positive, as it was getting somewhat dark in the office.

Finally Dick began to grow impatient.

"She seems to be on excellent terms with young Dale," he mused, "but I must wait awhile longer and see how matters turn out. Fan may only be playing spoons on him to draw him out. I wonder what she meant when she declared that she wanted no harm to come to old Snip? What possible interest can she have in him? There's a good deal hanging back that I do not know, but must find out."

Presently Julian Dale arose, left the office and entered the bar-room.

Then Frisky Fan motioned for Dick to approach, which he did.

"I haven't found out much," the girl sport said, "because I had to be cautious, to begin with. I learned this much, however: Julian and his father have had a bitter quar-

rel over me, and they are now deadly enemies. Julian has been turned from his father's door almost penniless, and on the strength of our acquaintance I gave him some money."

"Now, when I get another opportunity, and he is calmer, I'll work him for points and find out how much he knows. If, by hook or crook, he can do the old man an ill-turn, you can bet he will do it. The Dales are hot-heads, who never forget nor forgive. Julian will probably get full to-night, and on such occasions men are liable to be loose-tongued. Meantime, you had better keep away from here, for I fancy if Julian saw us together it might arouse his jealousy, and so spoil all."

"Right you are," Dick replied, and at once entered the supper room, the repast being ready.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ROAD-AGENT'S STORY.

AFTER a hearty supper, Dick sought the street. As he passed through the office, he noted that Julian Dale was again seated by the side of Frisky Fan, but the detective pretended not to see them.

The night outside was a glorious one. The sky was clear and studded with myriads of stars, which paled into insignificance in the effulgent light of the soaring moon, now nearly at its full.

Dick paused outside the hotel a few minutes, deliberating where to go. He had no desire to visit any of the saloons and gambling houses.

Suddenly an idea came to him.

The day before he had noticed a big slab shanty, beyond the outskirts of the town—a rather dilapidated affair, which evidently had been thrown together, without regard to style or shape, and he had been informed, on inquiry, that the building was the ore mill, and covered the shaft of the Electric Mine.

So, by a sudden impulse, Dick directed his footsteps in the direction of the old mill.

The night was as clear as day, and being well-armed, he had no thought of trouble or danger.

The mine was about a half-mile distant from the hotel, but the detective was not long in covering the distance.

As he drew near the big shed he gazed searchingly around.

The locality was a desolate one.

The mill was surrounded on all sides by a tract of country thickly covered with low bushes, cacti, and briars, with here and there a gaunt, blasted tree. Grim, slim rocks towered up here and there to the height of a man, looking gray and ghostly in the moonlight, and over all brooded a sort of supernatural silence. Even the old grim ore mill looked dark and forbidding, and its towering smokestack resembled some black giant of ill-omen.

"Rather a gruesome place of a night," Dick muttered aloud, as he sat down on a rock and surveyed his surroundings. "Especially this old mill. If I were of a superstitious mind, I should be inclined to suspect that there had been blood spilled inside of that old den."

"And your suspicions would prove you to be a correct guesser!" said a voice just behind him.

Wheeling, Dick uttered a cry of surprise and anger, for he now once more gazed upon the masked face and figure of Scarlet Seth.

The road-agent held the "drop," too.

"Curse you!" Dick cried, "what do you want, now?"

"Nothing more than a little confidential chat with you," was the reply. "I mean you no harm, sir. I simply want to canvas with you a matter that interests us both. If you will promise no hostile demonstration, I'll put up my gun, and sit down and have a talk."

Dick eyed the road-agent a moment, in dis-

trust. He was not quite sure but Scarlet Seth was up to some artful dodge.

"What do you want to talk about?" he demanded.

"Well, several matters. One in particular concerns Mr. Simeon Snip, of St. Louis!"

"Well," Dick assented, "put up your pop, and come and sit down in front of me. I'm as gentle as a kitten, unless I'm teased; then, I generally show my claws."

The road-agent laughed, as he put away his revolver, came around and threw himself on the grass, in front of the detective.

"Ye needn't tell me about yourself," he said, "because I've picked up a few pointers. If I'd 'a' known as much about you, when I held you up, I'd not done it. So here's yer money," and Scarlet Seth tossed a buckskin pouch into Deadwood Dick's lap.

"Now, then," he went on, "we will git down to business. Where is Simeon Snip?"

"You tell me, and I'll tell you. I haven't seen him in the last two days."

"You came here from St. Louis to assist him, did you not?"

"Yes, but not until I had discovered that he was playing the *role* of the Reverend Jim Jimson, did I get a chance to speak to him, and then, only for a few minutes."

"Jim Jimson!" echoed the road-agent, in astonishment. "You don't mean *that*? You don't mean the fightin' preacher war really my—war really Simeon Snip of St. Louis?"

"That's precisely what I do mean. By the way, Mr. Road-Agent, who are you, may I ask, that you know of, and appear to take such an interest in Snip?"

"I'll have to tell you a little story, to explain that. But, by the Jumpin' Jericho, if Simeon Snip has really disappeared, there's been foul play, and I know whose door to lay it at!"

"David Dale's?" Dick queried.

"Exactly," Seth replied. "If Simeon Snip is missing, ye can bet that Dave Dale had a hand in his disappearance!"

"Just about my idea," Deadwood Dick replied. "If Mr. Snip had been about town, the past two days, he would most naturally have hunted me up."

"Perzactly! Detective, it remains for you an' I to ferret this racket out, and if any harm has come to Simeon Snip, the Lord have mercy on Dave Dale!"

"Very good. If Dale has been guilty of what we suspect, he will find himself in hot water. But you have not explained your interest in him, and you a road-agent!"

"Road-agent it is true I am, but that does not imply that I may not have some good traits of character. Answer me a question more, then I will explain what you seemingly want to know!"

"Sail abead!"

"Well, to-night I saw you talking to Frisky Fan. I want to know what your intentions are toward that girl?"

"Perfectly honorable, sir. She is my good friend."

"She gave you a letter. What was in that?"

"I don't know that that is any of your business, sir!" Dick retorted.

"It is my business!" the road-agent declared.

"Pray, how so?"

"Because Frisky Fan is *my own sister's* child!"

"The deuce you say!"

"I speak the truth."

"Very well, I will take you at your word, although I am surprised. As to that which your sister's child gave me, it was a telegram sent to me by Miss Sally Snip of St. Louis, via Bullionville. Is that explanation satisfactory?"

"Perfectly so. And now you want the story. I suppose?"

"Exactly."

"Well, here it is, such as it is. Years

ago a poor young woman who had come West in hopes of better luck, married a rich Missourian—a trader by profession. The young woman's name was Margaret Dale before her marriage. The Missourian's name you will know later on.

"The younger brother of Margie—they were orphans—accompanied her to the West, but soon after the marriage he disappeared, and no one knew whither he went. He did not go so far, however, that he could not keep posted every few months as to his sister's life.

"The marriage was an unhappy one. Her husband was a hard drinker, and though when sober he was all right, when drunk he was too ugly to live with. They endured a sort of cat and dog's life together for two years, and two children were born to them—a boy and a girl. The boy died.

"At the end of two years, poor Margie, with her child in her arms, went to live with her elder brother, her husband having deserted her and disappeared.

"This elder brother was a man of vicious character. The incumbrance of Margie and her child upon his hands by no means sweetened his sour temper, and one wild snowy night, in a fit of rage, he threw Margie out of doors and her babe after her, and closed his door upon them.

"What became of them he never knew until recently. He had lived on in the supposition that they had perished in the snow. But they hadn't!

"When the younger heard of the elder brother's brutal act, he took an oath to murder him. But, first of all, it devolved upon the younger brother to find Margie and her child.

"The elder brother would 'keep,' said this younger brother, who, I might as well add here, was your humble servant."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. But to proceed. I was a long time finding the trail. I searched like a bloodhound for it, and was upon the point of giving up in despair, when I run across a clew.

"Margie, in her wanderings, had fallen in with a band of Gypsies, and she, having no home, accepted their offer to become one of their number. But this band of nomads soon utterly disappeared, and I could only vaguely ascertain, at intervals, where they had been seen. I took the trail. I followed for months, ay, for years. But that failure had no effect to break my determination to find my sister. When I took the trail, Margie's child was only a year old. When I found Margie, the child had grown to budding womanhood, and was nearly seventeen years of age.

"On her deathbed, Margie told me her story.

"I had, finally, found her in a cabin, on the outskirts of Virginia City. Here she had lived for two years, dying a slow but certain death. A year before, she had sent her daughter upon the world to earn enough to keep them from starving, and Fanny had responded nobly by sending home money sufficient to provide poor sister with plenty of food, fuel and medicine, and such luxuries as she might need. But it was no use. The seal of Death was set upon poor Margie, and she died in my arms. Before she died, she told me where to find Fanny, and made me promise to look after the girl's welfare. Of course I promised, and, outlaw though I had then become, through having killed several ruffians in a single-handed conflict in self-defense—I came to these parts. I found my niece—found a lively, free-hearted and fearless, honorable girl. When I found out this, I swore to high Heaven that if it ever came to my knowledge that mortal man dared to asperse her name or honor, or in any way whatsoever seek to injure her, I'd kill that man with as little compunction as I would a snake!"

"Bravo!" cried Dick, heartily; "and were it a hundred men who attacked you, instead of one, I'd stand by you!"

"Thank you!" Scarlet Seth replied. "I see I was not mistaken in my estimate of the kind of a man you are. Shake!"

And shake they did, thereby sealing a pledge of friendship.

"And now that you have confided so much to me," Deadwood Dick said, "how about your brutal brother?"

"Inquiry resulted in finding out that he took himself off to the wild West many years ago, and I gave up all hopes of finding him until I came here, where I found him."

"Have you had a meeting?"

"We have, but he did not recognize me in my disguise of Scarlet Seth, the road-agent, nor did I mean he should, for I was not quite prepared to execute my vengeance."

"What kind of a looking man is your brother? I may have seen him."

"Have you seen David Dale, the self-claimed sole owner of the Electric Mine?"

"No, I have not."

"Well, when you do see him, you will have seen my brother."

"Your name is Dale, then?"

"Yes, Samuel Seth Dale."

"And Frisky Fan's name is Fanny Ferris?"

"No. My sister assumed a fictitious name after leaving her husband, and that's how Fanny comes to own the name of Ferris."

Dick remained mute for a moment. Then he said:

"Well, after all you have told me, you have not told me the whyfore of your interest in Mr. Snip, of St. Louis."

"My interest in him," replied Seth, "lies in the fact that he is the man who was once my sister's husband."

Deadwood Dick stared at the road-agent incredulously.

"Great Jupiter! Blame me if I can believe that!" he declared.

"It is nevertheless a fact," Scarlet Seth replied, grimly.

"Then, according to that, Frisky Fan must be Snip's daughter?"

"She is."

"Then, Snip married twice, eh?"

"No, only once."

"Then, how about the St. Louis daughter?"

"That is only his daughter by adoption."

"Aha! I see. Well, as your sister was Snip's wife, you are naturally his enemy?"

"On the contrary, I am not. Snip repented his rash act most sincerely, but it was when it was too late. He swore off drinking, joined a church, and I've heard say he came near dying through grief."

"It was not more than six months after I had taken the trail in search of Margie, that I encountered Snip in a Western town. It was in my heart to kill the man at sight, but when he found out who I was, and what was my mission, he evinced so much regret and repentance for what he had done, that I felt inclined to forgive him."

"He urged me earnestly to continue my search until I found Margie, and to facilitate my search, he gave five thousand dollars, spot cash, out of his pocket, with directions that I should draw on him for more, whenever I needed it."

"This satisfied me of his penitence, and the hatred I had formerly entertained for him died out. We are all humans, and all prone to make mistakes, I argue."

"And a very true saying it is, I allow," Dick declared.

"Yes, so it is," replied Seth. "Well, days flew into weeks, and weeks into months, and months into years, and it was not so awful long ere I had to draw on old Snip for money. It absorbs cash mighty fast to travel, and I was on the go constantly. Not twice did I send to Snip for large sums of

money, but many times, and he never failed to remit promptly, usually accompanying each remittance with a characteristic note, in which he would say: 'Keep on! keep on! Never give up the ship! You'll win yet!'

"When I found Margie, and after her death, I telegraphed to Snip that she was dead, but I said nothing about the child, preferring to withhold that news until later.

"When I arrived in Pokerville in disguise, I was not long in singling out Frisky Fan. I found that she was respectable, and fully able to take care of herself; known to none except to be admired. And so I chose not to disclose my identity to her."

"She does not know, then, that you are her relative?"

"No. She may have heard that there was such a character as Scarlet Seth, but, so far as knowing that I am in any way related to her, she does not. I preferred to keep her in total ignorance until the arrival of her father, when I would treat them both to a genuine surprise."

"On my arrival here I also made some other unexpected discoveries of no very slight importance. I found that David Dale was in possession, and self-claimed owner of the Electric Mine, and I also heard that the ownership of the mine had formerly been a stock company, all of the members of which were non-residents, except David Dale. I also learned how David had, after a year's time, swindled these stockholders, by notifying them that the mine had played out, and had been abandoned, whereas, the mine had been steadily worked since its opening to the exclusive profit of my villainous brother. I also learned that Snip, of St. Louis, was one of the stockholders, and I made up my mind to do the old man a good turn, by informing him of the state of affairs, which I did, well knowing he would lose no time in hastening hither. But, though I watched, he must have eluded me. I had little idea that Jim Jimson, the preacher, was old Snip."

"How did you come to learn of my coming here?"

"Through a friend of mine who lives in St. Louis. He telegraphed me at the time Snip started for Pokerville, and later, when you started. As you will remember, I apprehended you, but it was not until I saw you in Pokerville that I tumbled as to who you were. Now, if Snip has disappeared, we must find him—you and I. Have you formed any idea as to the best method to proceed?"

"Nothing definite. Meet me here to-morrow night, and maybe I'll have some news by that time."

The two men shook hands and separated.

After they were at a safe distance away, a man arose from behind a boulder, close to where the foregoing conversation had taken place, and glided away to Pokerville.

The man was Julian Dale.

CHAPTER XIII.

JULIAN DALE UNMASKS:

WHEN Deadwood Dick returned to the hotel he found Frisky Fan still there, but Julian Dale was not in her company, so took a seat at the table where she was sitting.

"Well, is there any news?" he asked, as he lit a fragrant Havana, and tipped back in his chair.

"Some!" Fan answered, "but not much. I had another chat with Julian, while you were in at supper, but he left me abruptly, and quitted the hotel, immediately after you did."

"He did? Did he explain his motive in this abrupt action?"

"No. He said nothing, but got up from the table, and left."

"Do you think he followed me?"

"He might have. He's got an idea in his head that you are his rival, and are trying to cut him out—or, at least, he had such an idea, but I think I disabused him of it, for

when he commenced to get spooney again, I told him that I thought well of him, and all that, but that only one thing could ever induce me to marry him, and that was by his proving his affection for me by working for me. He then wanted to know what I wanted him to do, and I told him.

"I explained that Mr. Snip, otherwise the Reverend Jim Jimson, had suddenly disappeared, and that David Dale probably knew more about the matter than any one else. It was for him, Julian, to devote his energies to the task of finding Mr. Snip, or what had become of him. I had just arrived at this point, when you left the hotel, and Julian arose and left also."

An angry frown mantled Dick's brow.

"I don't like this as much as I might!" he declared. "If I catch the fellow dogging my footsteps, I'll have to break his head for him."

He was exceedingly annoyed.

If Julian had followed, he had most likely overheard the revelation made by Seth, and this was something which the detective would not have had happen for a good deal.

"Well, if he followed you, I am sure it's none of my fault!" Fan said, rather frigidly—so frigidly, in fact, that he gave her an inquiring glance.

It popped into his head, just then, that perhaps she had a stronger regard for Julian than she was willing to admit. If this was the case, it might alter circumstances considerably.

"I rather opine I can't be too careful in this matter!" he mused.

They chatted awhile longer, and then, as it was yet early in the evening, Dick concluded that he would pay a visit to Mike Quincy's Pokerville Club, while Frisky Fan announced that she should soon retire, for the night, being pretty tired from her journey over from Bullionville.

Nevertheless, she retained her seat at the table in the hotel office, after Dick had taken his departure.

And she had only a few minutes to wait when Julian Dale re-entered the hotel, and took the seat Deadwood Dick had recently vacated.

His face was dark and sullen; his eyes glistening.

"You cannot deny that you are playing a double game," he hissed, leaning toward the girl sport, his midnight orbs fairly blazing.

"What do you mean?" Fan demanded coolly, and apparently unruffled.

"I mean that I saw that fellow sitting here at the table with you again, a few minutes ago. What explanation have you to make this time, pray?"

"I do not know, Mr. Julian Dale, that I am under obligations to make any explanation to you, except it is that had it not been that you were in such haste to leave the hotel, before, in order to dog Mr. Bristol's footsteps, you could have had a full explanation ere this. My advice to you, under the existing circumstances, is to take Horace Greeley's advice, and go West! You are somewhat West now, 'tis true, but there's plenty of space 'twixt here and the Jumping-Off Place!"

"Oh, Fanny! how can you be so cruel, when you know how truly and devotedly I love you?"

"I don't know that I'm particularly cruel," was the retort. "Not, knowingly, did I ever kill a hop-toad, much less a Dale. Take my advice, Julian, and keep wide of the path of Deadwood Dick, otherwise Mr. Bristol. If he catches you dogging him again, you'll want a wooden overcoat. He's not the sort of a person to stand that sort of thing."

"He's not caught me yet," leered Julian.

"Nevertheless, he knows you followed him, for he told me so, and advised me to warn you not to repeat the action."

"Humph! he sets himself up as a big man, does he?"

"And is amply able to sustain his opinion of himself. His mission here is as a detective, to find Mr. Snip, and he has enlisted me in his service. Further than that, I will say—if it will satisfy your jealousy—Mr. Bristol is no more to me than the man in the moon.

"But I will add this, Mr. Julian: You know what I told you you would have to do ere you ever talked love to me again. Do it, and then come to me for your answer. That is all. You must do this, or declare yourself unworthy of the woman you claim to love so fondly."

"I will do your bidding, Fanny, though it is the first time that a Dale ever knuckled under to a 'must!' But I warn you to beware of that fellow you call Deadwood Dick. He is a rank rascal, and I ain't a bit afraid to tell him so to his face. If you knew what I know, you would not hesitate to tell him so. He is your enemy even more so than mine."

"How so?"

"Well, since you have so aroused my anger and jealousy, Miss Fanny, I will explain. When I abruptly left you to-night, it was not with a pang of jealousy in my heart. I only wanted to see that this so-called Deadwood Dick was worthy of even a word from your peerless self. So I followed him.

"He went to the vicinity of the ore-mill, and whom do you suppose he met there?"

"I have not the slightest idea," Fan replied. "Who?"

"The person Deadwood Dick met at the mill was no less a notable gentleman than Mr. Scarlet Seth, the road-agent and stagestopper!"

Fan uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"I don't believe it!" she declared.

"Oh, I didn't expect you would. Why should you believe anything bad of your Adonis? However, maybe you will think differently, after a while, when I tell you what I overheard.

"When Deadwood Dick and Scarlet Seth met, it became evident that the meeting was prearranged. They sat down and chatted a while, and then entered upon the main subject.

"I cannot here repeat their conversation, but can give you an outline, so you will understand.

"It appears that these shrewd rascals have been searching for you for some time, and working out the history of your parentage, and have at last been successful. They know the main incidents of your life, from childhood up, and where your mother died, near Virginia City, and who your father is. The latter you do not even know yourself. Am I not right?"

"Go on," Frisky Fan said, impassively. "You are quite right in that respect. I never knew my father's name. "Go on!"

"Well," pursued Julian, triumphantly, "it appears that you are the offspring of a man of immense riches, who is literally turning the world topsy-turvy in his efforts to find you. Your father is to be decoyed here, in expectation of finding you, and on his arrival is to be captured and be held a prisoner until he pays a big amount of money for being told who and where you are. If he pays it, he is to be released, and you are to be restored to him. Before you leave Pokerville, however, you are to be captured, and then your father, the honorable parent who has expended a fortune to find you, will have to pay over a second large fortune and sign a certain legal document in order to regain possession of you.

"This, my dear Miss Ferris, is the plot of your Adonis, Deadwood Dick, and the slippery road-agent, Scarlet Sam—the most diabolical pair of rascals that stand in shoe-leather to-day!"

"I do not believe it! I will not believe it!" Fanny cried, vehemently. "This is but

a made-up story to poison my mind, and, as you hope, to win me. But it won't work, Mr. Julian Dale! Oh! no, no, no!"

Julian elevated his nose in disgust.

"About as much as I expected of you!" he retorted. "I took the trouble of giving you the information which I, for your sake, took the pains to gather, just to draw out the true side of your nature, well knowing it would be a thankless task. You have the privilege of waiting for the verification of what I have told you. But please remember that I am the only person who can avert this calamity and loss of money; the only one who can nip the plot in the bud—for I have only half told you what I know—and last, but not least, I am the only man who can tell you where your father is, and save him from being forced to give up fabulous sums of money. So you can do as you please about it. I do not, under your unlady-like treatment, feel inclined to interest myself further in the matter. Good-night?"

And Julian Dale arose to go.

"Hold on! tell me one thing," Frisky Fan said, excitedly, "and maybe I will believe you. Who is my father—what is his name?"

Julian smiled significantly.

"You want to know too much entirely!" he said. "When you get ready to promise to be mine I will tell. I will wait twenty-four hours. If I receive no favorable answer by that time, I may be tempted to allow these villains to proceed with their schemes."

And with this the younger Dale strode from the hotel with the mien of a lord, leaving Frisky Fan in a very perturbed state of mind.

CHAPTER XIV.

A "SCOOP THAT WAS A SCOOP, OR, POKER IN POKERVILLE."

DEADWOOD DICK proceeded to Mike Quincy's place.

His entrance created immediate attention, and he received nods of recognition from many patrons of the Club, who had seen him run Screechin' Sam out of the place.

Mike Quincy came forward, with extended hands, as Dick advanced toward the center of the room.

"Pard Dick," said he, "I am glad to see you again, for you're one o' the kind they wanted in this camp. Ye'r one o' them b'yees what ain't afraid to tackle them best of 'em, you bet. Screechin' Sam war heer awhile ago axin' after you, and he sez, sez he: 'Whar's that feller as throw'd me in the street? He's game and has my luv. He didn't make no more bones o' h'istin' me out o' that church 'an though I were a consarned baby. Tell him when he's got time I'd like to examine that grip o' his'n! Ef he ain't got a patent-lever vise in his dukes when he grabs a feller, then I'm a baby!'

"But I want to introduce you to the big gun of the camp, who—"

"Hold on!" Deadwood Dick interrupted, in an undertone. "I want to ask you a question. When did you last see the preacher, Jimson?"

"Haven't seen him for a couple o' days—not since he was in here after the fight. Why?"

"Oh, I didn't know but you had seen him!"

"No; not hide nor hair of him. But come, I want to introduce you to David Dale, the mine-owner. Do you ever play cards?"

"Occasionally."

"Good?"

"Fairly."

"Then clean him out if you can, and watch him, for he's as sharp as chain-lightning. If I see the game is in your favor, I'll bet on you."

"Only stake your money on the horse you know best," Dick advised. "However,

lead ahead. I'm not an expert in the jungle, but I'll tackle the tiger."

So Quincy led the way to a table near by, at which was seated no less a personage than David Dale.

"Mr. Dale, I'll take the liberty of making you acquainted with Mr. Dickens, a personal friend of mine. Dick, old boy, this is Mr. Dale, proprietor of the Electric Mine."

Both men acknowledged the introduction by shaking hands, and then Quincy added:

"I really haven't time to play to-night, Mr. Dale, for, as you see, business is rushing. Perhaps, however, my friend, Mr. Dickens, would not mind giving you a whirl."

"If it is Mr. Dickens's pleasure, I don't mind trying him a social game," Dale replied.

"Well, I'm not much of a success as a gambler," Dick rejoined, "but I don't mind a game of poker now and then."

"Very well. Quincy, will you oblige us with the cards and chips?"

Dale lit a fresh cigar, at the same time eying "Mr. Dickens" intently.

"You are not long in Pokerville, I take it, Mr. Dickens?" he remarked.

"Only a few days," Dick replied, "and I shall be here but a few days longer, if I don't get something to do."

"Ah! you are in search of employment, eh?"

"Yes."

"What is your line of work or profession?"

"Well, general office work, or assistant management of any business, is in my line. I've been in many kinds of business."

The cards and chips were soon produced, and the game began. It soon became evident to the detective that he had a skilled opponent, for Dale played craftily, and won the first two or three pots, which were not of any considerable amount.

During the play he took occasion to remark:

"I do not know that you will find it very easy to get employment here in Pokerville. I am the only one who gives employment to the populace, and I have no opening."

"Oh, well, if I can't get work here, I've the whole American country before me," Dick replied.

"The great trouble with men seeking chances," observed Dale, "is that they are too scrupulous or particular as to what they will or will not do. That's what makes so many unemployed men and women. There are plenty of chances always open, where an intelligent and active man, who isn't stuck on scruples, could make a competency for himself, particularly if he could keep a silent tongue in his head, and obey orders."

Dick took the cue at once as he dealt the cards.

"Well, I ain't what men call rich, but I won't have to buy bread at a cent a loaf for awhile yet," he declared. "I've got my eye on a ranch, however, soon as I add somewhat to my exchequer. I quite agree with you that the man wanting work generally comes out at the slim end of the horn, if his conscience runs his machine."

"Just so! Just so!" Mr. Dale acquiesced, with a nod of approval.

The game progressed, and Dick began to win.

Mr. Dale did not appear to mind this, as the pots rarely exceeded ten dollars.

In the mean time Mr. Dale said:

"I said I had no work to give out, but to a confidential person I could give a job. The salary would be one hundred and fifty dollars per month, for what time I might require the services, and if success followed, two thousand dollars would be bestowed as an honorarium, at the expiration of the service, which would probably not be of more than two months' duration."

"While not so scrupulous as a Methodist

minister, I should have to know about what would be required of me, to entitle me to the salary you name, and the honorarium, as you term it," Dick returned.

"Just so. And I don't mind telling you, providing you promise secrecy, no matter whether you accept the offer or not."

"I'm close-tongued in matters of business, always, and if I see an opening here, whether I take it or not, I have nothing to gain by loosening my tongue."

"Good. I like the way you put that. So I will tell you. My brother-in-law and myself were formerly owners of the Electric Mine in this place. A long illness, quite recently, resulted in my brother-in-law becoming hopelessly insane, and at times violent. Several times, while laboring under a hallucination that I was robbing him, he made attempts upon my life, and it became a terror to me to meet him, lest he should do me bodily harm."

"Finally, out of sheer desperation, and not wishing to see him committed to an asylum, I had him confined in a little retreat, near this town. The first guard I set to watch him and see that he did not escape, was a worthless, drunken fellow, and one night, in one of his drunken states, he got too near, and in a sudden frenzy, my brother-in-law pounced upon and killed him."

"The next man deserted after two days' service, and the last man says I'd better look for a fourth, as he's going to throw up the job, being afraid his patient may break his chains, and serve him as he did Number One. So, you see, I am compelled to offer an extra price, if I can get a man who will stay at his post. I don't want any coward, and I take it, in sizing you up, that you are not one."

"I have never had the reputation of being one," Dick assured. "Mr. Dale, my hand is worth fifty dollars to open it on."

"Indeed! I wonder what you have got. Well, I'll see you, and raise you fifty better!"

"Good! Fifty better!"

"Fifty better!"

"Fifty better!"

And so it went on until all the chips were in the pot.

Then Dale, whose bet it was, drew a roll of money from his pocket and laid it upon the pot.

"There's twenty-five hundred better," he said, his eyes glittering. "My friend, Mr. Dickens, will surely not think of covering that!"

"Well," and Dick elevated his eyebrows, "and smiled in a way that was both bland and serene, "that is a pretty big raise, Mr. Dale, and many a widow and orphan would get lots of comfort out of that pot. Consequently, being an orphan, I cannot afford to stand any blushing. I will see your twenty-five hundred, and go you twenty-five hundred better. Here's the sugar."

And taking a little roll of big bills from his pocket, Dick extracted six bills of the denomination of five hundred dollars each, and deposited them upon the pot.

For the instant, David Dale was literally paralyzed. He foresaw that he had made a bad break.

He held four kings.

If Mr. Dickens, as he knew him, would raise on twenty-five hundred, why, it was almost a sure thing that Mr. Dickens must have four aces.

However, the pot was so big that backing down now was out of the question.

Four kings must surely win, unless his opponent held the invincible four aces.

"Well," he said, after a moment's hesitation, "I shall have to see you and go you a thousand better. There's just that amount in there."

And taking a red leather wallet from his inside pocket he laid it upon the pile.

"I don't know that the full amount is there," Dick remarked, "but I'll take the

contents and be satisfied, and run the risk, and—and—let me see how much money I have left."

Then he took the roll of bills from his pocket, and counted over slowly, carefully.

By this time a crowd had been attracted about the table, among whom were the heavy betters of Pokerville—Mike Quincy, Sam Leonard, and Sandy McPherson—all of whom were greatly interested, for such heavy stakes had never before been laid in the Pokerville Club.

"I have just five thousand dollars left—five thousand cold greenbacks—and I'll raise you that amount Mr. Dale, if you please!"

And the sport detective deposited his money, accordingly, on top of the other sums in the pot.

Dale uttered an oath.

"May I be cursed if I see the raise!" he cried, furious with rage, "nor shall you have all that money, you low-lived gambler!"

And, with this, he made a grab for the pot.

But he didn't grab!

Mike Quincy evidently anticipated Dale's tactics, for he seized his wrist, and jerked the mine-owner off his chair upon the floor.

"Dave Dale," he cried, "you tried that racket once before in my place, and I told you then, if ever I caught you at it again, I'd put a bullet through you. I ought, by rights, to do it now, but I'll let you off this once more. Leave my saloon, and never enter it again, for if you do, I'll shoot you down as I would a coyote!"

Dale arose, put on his hat, and, without a word, slunk from the saloon.

While Dick "raked" in the pot.

He had got back his own money, and as much more besides.

CHAPTER XV.

FRISKY FAN DEMANDS AN EXPLANATION.

THAT ended the events of that night, so far as the detective was concerned, and pocketing his winnings and treating the jubilant crowd, he went back to the hotel, and retired for the night.

But, he didn't sleep much, for now nearly every tough citizen in the camp knew that he carried a large sum of money about him, and there was no telling what scheme they might conceive to get it away from him. For if the looks of the majority of the Poker-villians was an index of their characters, they were surely a hard crowd.

So Dick had his revolvers handy, for instant use, in case of emergency.

But, morning came at last, without any trouble having taken place, and Dick arose, for a new day of action, feeling but little the better for his almost sleepless night in bed.

Before going down-stairs he carefully examined his revolvers, for there was no telling how soon he would be called upon to use them.

It was just dawn when he left the room and went down through the hotel office and out upon the street.

The day promised anything but pleasant weather, for the sky was overcast with sultry grayish clouds, and the air had the feeling of rain or snow.

The town was not yet astir, which was quite satisfactory to Dick, considering what he had in view.

Leaving the camp by the southern end of the street, he walked slowly along the stage-trail, keeping a sharp lookout on either side, as if looking for some one, or something, in particular.

Directly, when he was about a mile from the town, he paused at a point where a bold jutting of rock loomed up, at the left of the trail.

In the face of this rock were numerous seams, or crevices, some of which were big enough to admit a man's hand.

Here Deadwood Dick proceeded to put

matters to a test, by thrusting his hand into the different apertures—a risky thing to do, for there was no telling but what he might lay his hand on a fat rattlesnake, or some other venomous reptile.

At last he found the place he wanted—a shallow cavity, in which any small article could be deposited, without danger of its dropping out of reach.

"This is the place," Dick muttered, marking well the location of the crevice. "I can leave my money there, and no one will think of looking for it."

So saying, he took from his pocket a neat little package wrapped in oilskin. It contained all the money he had brought with him to Pokerville, with the exception of a few dollars.

"Now, if I get into trouble, they can't rob me of much!" he soliloquized, as he made his way back toward Pokerville, which was just astir when he entered the camp.

Among the first persons he encountered was the girl sport.

Her appearance seemed to indicate that she had slept but little during the night, for her eyes were inflamed as if with weeping.

"Good-morning, Miss Ferris!" Dick said, raising his hat politely. "You're abroad rather early, are you not?"

"I am an early riser, always, sir," was the answer, with an air of unmistakable frigidity. "More than that, I do not know that you longer have any right to speak to me!"

"Indeed? Why, what has caused this sudden change to come over you, Miss Ferris? Have I in *any* way offended you? If I have I wish to apologize, and make all the reparation that lies in my power."

"Is it not an offense for two men to enter into a conspiracy against a single woman?"

"Assuredly, yes. But I am concerned in no conspiracy against you. That would be the last thing I should think of."

"Do you deny that last night you met and had a consultation with Scarlet Seth, the road-agent, and that I was one of the subjects of your conversation?"

"I do not deny that fact. I did meet the road-agent by accident, and he forced me into an interview with him, the result of which was for your benefit, rather than otherwise."

"Oh! undoubtedly!" Fan replied, sarcastically. "I dare say you two gentlemen would come in for *your* share of the spoils."

"Spoils! Why, Miss Ferris, I do not understand at all what you mean, I assure you!"

"Then I will make it plainer. You and this ruffian, Scarlet Seth, have entered into a conspiracy to lure my father, whom I have never seen, to this place, in search of me. He is to be captured, and being very wealthy, you hope to bleed him of a big sum of money before you will show him who I am, or where I am. If he ponies up, as you anticipate, you will cause him to meet me and know that I am his daughter. Then I am to be kidnapped and you will force him to give up another big sum of money before you will restore me to him. Very romantic plot, isn't it?"

And the girl sport laughed mockingly, while Deadwood Dick flushed angrily.

"This is infamous!" he cried, "and I see now who is at the back of it all—that infernal whelp, Julian Dale. Through pure jealousy he has been trying to poison your mind against me. He dogged my footsteps last night, sneaking cur that he is, and overheard what passed between Seth and myself. Then he set to work and manufactured this base story to suit his own villainous purpose."

"Truth of the matter is, I should never have learned who you really are, but for Scarlet Seth. There is *no* conspiracy against you at all, more than that we two shall try

to find your father, and when we find him, reunite you to him with no thought of exacting a dollar from him."

"Who is my father?"

"Why, I supposed you knew."

"I do not. All I know is that mamma separated from him when I was very small. She assumed her maiden name, I believe; leastwise, she would never tell me my father's name."

"I should have thought your dear Julian would have told you," Dick said, banteringly.

It was Fan's turn to flush with indignation now.

"It so happens that I have no dear Julian, nor do I expect to have. Julian Dale is nothing to me, nor will he ever be. It was he who told me what I have told you, but although I did not give much credence to the story, I made up my mind to lay the matter before you at the very first opportunity, as you have seen. I tried to get Julian to tell me who my father was, but he refused, unless I would promise to marry him. Of course I refused to do any such a thing, and he went off in a huff."

"The scoundrel! Just wait till I can get my hands on him, and I'll make him dance juba, and don't you forget it. I'll fix him!" and Dick's eyes flashed with anger.

"Well, if he has been lying to me, as you say," Fan replied, "I hope you will give him a good thrashing. But you haven't told me what my father's name is yet."

"Your father's name is Simeon Snip. He is the man whom you first saw in the *role* of the Reverend Jim Jimson."

"Good gracious! That pilgrim my father—*my* father?" ejaculated Fanny. "Really, Mr. Bristol, it does not seem possible!"

"It is, nevertheless, true."

"How did you find out?"

"I received my information from Scarlet Seth, the road-agent."

"Indeed? But what in the world can he know of me or of my father?"

"He knows all about you both. Although now an outlaw, he is really your uncle, and as such takes a warm interest in your welfare."

"My uncle? Oh, horrible!"

"Your mother's brother," Dick replied. "His name is Samuel Seth Dale, and he is a younger brother of David Dale, who is also your uncle. Your mother's maiden name was not Ferris, as I understand it, but Margaret Dale. She assumed the name of Ferris after she left your father. For a number of years, since you were a child, Seth Dale has devoted his life to searching for you and your mother. At last he found her upon her deathbed. Did you know of your mother's death?"

"Yes. Some one sent me notice of her death, but I did not receive it until after she had been buried nearly two weeks."

"Well, I trust, now, that you are satisfied that I am not engaged in any *conspiracy* against you," Dick said, with a smile.

"Quite so, and I am willing to assist you in all ways I can to find my father."

"Well, you may be useful. Keep around where you can be found very handy, for I may find something for you to do very soon."

And so saying, Dick bade her good-morning, and passed on toward the hotel.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE END.

WHEN Deadwood Dick reached the hotel it was yet too early for breakfast, so he sat down in the office to wait and think.

He had not been seated long when a ragged, dirty-looking boy entered, and cast a searching glance around.

Seeing no one but Dick, the boy edged toward him.

"W'ar's der Dutchy proprietor ov this shebang?" he queried.

"He hasn't got up, yet, I reckon. What do you want, sonny?" was Dick's response.

"I want to see a feller what's called Mr. Dickens!"

"Hello! what's this?" Dick mentally soliloquized. "A challenge from David or Julian Dale, I'll bet a dollar!"

Aloud, he said:

"Well, bub, I'm the one you're looking for. What do you want, my lad?"

"I've got a letter fur you, an' I wants ten cents fer fetchin' it, 'cause ma told me to collect toll at both ends. Ma is bizness, she is!"

"Yes, she appears to be," Dick replied, with a laugh, as he took the extended envelope. "Tell your ma, however, that if her business abilities are so great, to lay this aside toward getting you a pair of boots—for the boy was barefooted."

And Dick gave him a bright silver quarter.

"I hain't got no change, mister," the boy said, handling the coin as though it were a flimsy piece of glass.

"Never mind the change, my boy; run right along. The money is all yours. But, before you go, I want to ask if you know the man who gave you this letter?"

"I reckon. He keeps me trottin', lots, an' never gives much, but you bet, ma she takes it out on him in de rent."

"All right. You keep a still tongue in your head, and call around here every day, several times, and I'll maybe have something for you to do. Do you know what a still tongue in the head means?"

"You mean that I'se to keep mum!"

"Exactly!"

"That's jes' what de boss tells me."

"He does, eh? Well, here's your boodle. Five minutes from now, come back, and maybe I'll have a message to carry. Now you can go."

And the boy skurried away.

Dick, then, once more tipped back in his chair, opened and began to peruse the letter.

As he had expected, it was from David Dale, and ran as follows:

"MY DEAR MR. DICKENS:—

"SIR:—At the earliest opportunity I wish to apologize to you for my unseemly and ungenteel conduct of last night. That I made a confounded ass of myself, I will admit; and while I do not mind the pecuniary loss, I do not forget that I am still in your debt. For, I being banker, the chips were not cashed for that you paid for in that last pot.

"If you will do me the honor to call upon me, at as early an hour as you can after breakfast, I will cancel my obligations so far as cards are concerned, and we will talk over that other matter.

"Yours, &c.,

"DAVID DALE."

"That other matter!" mused the detective. "All is not lost yet. That alleged crazy prisoner is Mr. Snip, and I shall certainly have to accept Mr. Dale's invitation, although I now believe that the villain has secret designs on me. I suspect that he really knows who I am, and so gives out this scheme to entrap me also, as he has entrapped old Simeon. But he will reckon without his host, I opine," and Dick smiled over the situation. Going to his room, he wrote merely the following:

"MY DEAR SIR:—

"I will see you about nine o'clock.

"Yours, DICKENS.

"P. S.—I shall send by same messenger. Pay at your end. D."

Then he descended to the office just in time to find the boy who had brought the message.

"Here!" Dick said, handing the lad the envelope. "Take this to David Dale. Here's a quarter. Make him pay, also, at the other end of the route. Skip, now!"

"Sonny" grinned as he clutched the quarter, and then the letter, and darted away.

After breakfast Dick sauntered down to Mike Quincy's and looked in.

Few customers were present, but Michael was "behind the slab" to entertain all who indulged in an "eye-opener."

"Hello, pard!" he saluted. "Waltz right up and put your dashboard to the front. How d'ye want it, hot or cold?"

"Very cold," Dick replied. "A good cigar, please."

"What! no wake-me-up so early in the morn'?"

"Well, no," Dick replied, "for—

"A good clear head on our man John, Is better than a demijohn!"

"Well, ye'r' not fur off thar!"

As Dick took the cigar, three men entered the saloon—Julian Dale, Screechin' Sam, and—David Dale!

By the mirror back of Quincy's box, Dick saw the *entree*, without turning around to face his enemies.

He realized in an instant what it meant. The letter to him was a blind to locate him and throw him off his guard.

He well knew now that his life hung in the balance. It was fight, most likely, and fight to the death. If there was fight, Dick did not know that he could depend upon more than one man—Mike Quincy, as his backer.

He quietly finished lighting his cigar and then faced about.

The trio had their backs against the wall opposite him. In Western meaning this means fight.

"Well," Dick called out, while to the astonishment of the others he slid a self-cocking six-shooter down out of his sleeves into his grasp, "is there anything I can do for you, gents? I'm the most obliging man in Nevada. Walk right up. If you want electricity, I can produce the article. Your say!"

"Yes, and I'll take a trip on this myself!" cried Quincy, picking up a "pop" from the shelf. "It there's goin' to be a dance, why I'll have a fiddle in it!"

David Dale uttered an oath.

"Oh, will you?" he cried. "I'll have my revenge, too, on you as well! You have harbored that scoundrel whom I now know to be a spy and traitor to my interests, so down you go, both of you!"

Up went his hand as he spoke; but, almost before Dick could level his own ready weapon, Quincy's revolver spoke—once—twice—thrice—and the pistols of the three men against the wall exploded harmlessly as they threw up their arms—death-stricken by the shots they themselves had challenged.

A scene of intense excitement, of course, ensued, but, Dick was master of the situation.

Springing upon a chair, he addressed the men in the now crowded room, and in a clear statement explained the whole affair, giving a history of Dale's rascalities, and revealing the identity of Jimson as the wronged Simeon Snip, and of Frisky Fan as his child.

Hardly had this been done when cries were heard on the street, and a moment more the crowd opened to admit—

The Reverend Jim Jimson and Frisky Fan, hand in hand!

At which sight the crowd's huzzas were deafening.

The "Reverend" was compelled to "orate" again, which he did, confirming, of course, all that Dick had revealed, and telling how Dale had spirited him away three days before, to have him perish of starvation in a cave up in the hills, but he had been found there by Scarlet Seth, and by him released, and brought safely back to town.

He also fully explained who Seth was, and announced that, now that their arch-enemy and persecutor was dead, Scarlet Seth was no longer road-agent and outlaw, but would, with their consent, become a citizen of Pokerville, and share-owner in the stolen mine—representing his own and his niece's interest. Would they accept of him, and let bygones be bygones?

A hearty "Ay!" was the response.

So it was decreed; and Seth Dale, taking

possession of the Dale Mansion, with Fanny as housekeeper, soon had the affairs, not only of the Electric Mine in good shape, but the affairs of Pokerville as well, for the town prospered immensely under his wise and liberal administration, and he soon became the favorite of every man, woman and child in that mountain city!

And Simeon?

Well, he was literally given the freedom of the town, but his interests called him back to St. Louis, where, with his adopted and much-beloved daughter "Sally," he dispenses a fine hospitality—as a man of his wealth should.

He cannot lure Fanny, however, away from her Wild West home. She is her uncle's pet and keeper, and there we leave her, quite happy and content—the real lady of the now thriving mining center.

And Dick Bristol?

To all denizens of Pokerville he was the "King-Pin" of men; but, such honor would not long satisfy one of his restless, adventurous nature, and—we shall hear again of him later!

THE END.

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